

Peach Bloom

NORTHROP MORSE



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PEACH BLOOM



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AN ORIGINAL PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY
NORTHROP MORSE
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1913

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this play, whether professional or amateur,
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DEC 24 1913

DEDICATED
TO
THE UNNUMBERED THOUSANDS
OF GIRLS WHO HAVE SUFFERED
THROUGH IGNORANCE



CAST OF CHARACTERS

ERIC HAMILTON.

PROFESSOR MILES MORRIS.

"GUSSIE FLINT."

EDWARDS, *a Butler.*

JURGEN, *a Footman.*

PETER, *a "Doorman."*

FRANCIS, *a Footman.*

A POLICEMAN.

HILDEGARDE MORRIS.

MRS. MORRIS, "JINNY."

ROSIE.

"MADAME."

MRS. OAKES.

MRS. WALTER PRESCOTT, "LAURA."

DOLLY.

KITTY.

EVA, *a Maid.*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene I: — The Library of the PRESCOTTS' city home. Mid-afternoon in April.

Scene II: — The street outside "MADAME'S" house. Immediately following the preceding scene.

ACT TWO

Scene: — The sitting-room of a suite in MADAME'S house. Two minutes have elapsed.

ACT THREE

Scene: — The same room as in Act Two. Midnight of the following day.

ACT FOUR

Scene: — Living-room of the MORRISES at Clarendon, a country college town.

Four o'clock in the afternoon of a mid-May day, almost a month later.

The play opens in a typical large American city.

Time: — Today.



ACT I

Scene I

The library of the PRESCOTTS'; a large luxurious room of a city home, revealing owners of wealth and cultivated taste, who use it as a living-room. Fine books, etchings, rugs, a great carved mantel, beautiful doors and wood-work give it distinction. An open fire is burning. Opposite are two entrance doors, and a large window at the right looks towards the street.

MRS. MORRIS comes in in handsome street costume. She is about forty, sweet-faced and maternal. She is of assured social class and education, but has just that air of one who has left the city many years ago. She lays aside her coat.

(EDWARDS, the Butler, comes in bringing a newspaper.)

EDWARDS

The afternoon paper, Madame.

PEACH BLOOM

MRS. MORRIS

(*Taking it*) Thank you, Edwards. Have Mrs. Prescott and my daughter got back yet?

EDWARDS

No, Madame, but there's the bell now.

MRS. MORRIS *takes up the paper and begins to read the front page eagerly.* MRS. PRESCOTT *enters in a moment; she is a year or so MRS. MORRIS's senior, of the same assured social class and upbringing, but is metropolitan to her finger tips. She is in street costume, but has already removed her hat, etc., before coming in.*

MRS. PRESCOTT

Well Jinny, had a fine time with the rest of your shopping?

MRS. MORRIS

I certainly did revel in the shops again! . . . Laura, here are two columns more about that young girl who disappeared a month ago. I don't see how a girl out of such a family, so carefully brought up and guarded, *can* vanish! . . . I suppose Hildegard went upstairs just now?

MRS. PRESCOTT

Hildegarde? I didn't see her.

MRS. MORRIS

But she came back with you, Laura.

MRS. PRESCOTT

(Showing great surprise) With me, Jinny?
I left your daughter with you at that silk counter.

MRS. MORRIS

What! Then she hasn't been with either of us since we separated to finish our errands! I looked up after you left and she was gone; I thought of course with you. What has become of her?

MRS. PRESCOTT

You're not going to be the nervous mother?

MRS. MORRIS

I've some reason to be.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Yes, dear cousin, if she were a Pekinese lap dog! But you can't stuff your Hildegarde into a handbag and run off with her!

PEACH BLOOM

MRS. MORRIS

(*Rising*) Laura Prescott! . . . But Hildegarde is a young girl, entirely unused to the city, — and ignorant.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Ignorant?

MRS. MORRIS

Innocent then.

MRS. PRESCOTT

I'm glad,— a girl like that is safe in her innocence.

MRS. MORRIS

I'll go right over to the store now.

MRS. PRESCOTT

I'll telephone too,— just to reassure you —

MRS. MORRIS

(*Taking up her coat*) And when I come back there's something I want to talk to you about, Laura,— whether it's best to keep Hildegarde so very innocent.

The door opens and HILDEGARDE comes running in, radiant. She is seventeen years old, a very pretty, rose-complexioned girl, just budding into beauty; high-spirited, with a gallant carriage; affectionate; girlish; healthy.

Her hair is in a long braid, and she has on a tasteful spring street costume. She runs gaily to her mother, shaking her finger at her, and laughing.

MRS. MORRIS

Hildegarde, you naughty child!

HILDEGARDE

You naughty runaway mother! I'll write to Father how you deserted me!

MRS. MORRIS

Daughter, you frightened me so!

HILDEGARDE

(Impulsively runs over and kisses her mother fondly) I didn't really frighten you, you dear, darling, funny little Motherkins, did I? Why, I wouldn't for the world! When you know I'm *perfectly* able to take care of myself! Why I wanted to save *your* time, so I skipped off to buy Maggie's shawl; and when I came back to the silk counter, there I was a poor, friendless girl whose mother had left her just like an umbrella!

MRS. MORRIS

Never leave me like that again, dear!

MRS. PRESCOTT

How'd you get home so soon?

HILDEGARDE

(*Her eyes shining*) Oh, such an adventure, Cousin Laura! In popped little I into a taxicab,— and wasn't it exciting out in the big city,— *all alone!*

MRS. MORRIS

Hilda, never, never go alone in a taxi!

HILDEGARDE

But as we turned the corner just now, I saw Cousin Laura get out of one!

MRS. MORRIS

When will you learn, dear, that grown up people can do a great many things young girls can't?

HILDEGARDE

I have *learned* it, but I don't know why it should be so. Haven't I got lots more muscle than you have, Muzzer dear? Just feel my biceps, Cousin Laura! If anybody tried to steal my purse,— he'd get this,— *smash!*

Strikes her palm with her small clenched fist.

MRS. MORRIS

You must believe things, dear, because your mother says them.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Now we've got a little time, let's get those favors ready for Hildegarde's dance.

HILDEGARDE *jumps up and gets out of the table drawer a mass of lovely paper garlands,—soft delicate colors made into ropes,—the Hawaiian "leis."*

HILDEGARDE

Let me help too,— for that lovely party you're giving tomorrow on my birthday night,— you dear Cousin Laura!

She works deftly, and waits on the others, getting scissors, etc., as they fashion the "leis."

MRS. PRESCOTT

What was this shawl you ran away and distracted your mother so for, Missy?

HILDEGARDE

A beauty I got for Maggie Flannagan, my dear old nurse. (*Lifts her handbag and shakes it gaily at her mother*) Half the money I'd saved so

hard for three months,— gone in a whiff! . . . I made them send out for a spandy fresh one, and now I'm dreadfully afraid it won't get here *in time!*

MRS. PRESCOTT

In time,— for what?

HILDEGARDE

(*As she works; speaking with the strong convictions of youth*) You see, Cousin Laura, Maggie's got just the horriddest, contemptiblest — that's a hard word to say, but it's just what I mean — *contemptiblest* sister-in-law, Leonora O'Halligan, who looks down on her, because Maggie was born nothing but a Flannagan! Did you hear that 'O' in front of O'Halligan? Well, that one little letter makes all the difference between your being high-toned and just — *dirt!* And she's coming day after tomorrow to visit Maggie, and make remarks about Maggie's low birth!

MRS. PRESCOTT

(*Laughing*) Why even an old-clothes man has to have somebody to be snobby to!

HILDEGARDE

I just despise snobs! (*Taking a letter out of*

her handbag and reading it) I got this letter from Maggie this noon:—

‘Plaze Miss Hildergarde, sind the shawl right off ter me thot yer promised me fer next Christmas; an thin I kin be sated in me parlur-r, this Sunday, wit’ me figgure swathed up in its gorgeous an’ iligant folds,—not mindin’ how war-rm th’ day should turn, an’ just bedazzle the gaze of thot vain, dishdainful Leonora O’Halligan!’ . . . And after that suppose she had to wear her faded old gray shawl!

MRS. MORRIS

Tomorrow’s Saturday,—can you get it to her way out in the country?

HILDEGARDE

I must! I think by parcel post,—she’s on the R. F. D.

MRS. PRESCOTT

There’s a substation only a block and a half away,—I’ll have someone take it out.

HILDEGARDE

I wouldn’t bother you for anything, Cousin Laura!

MRS. MORRIS

Hilda and I’ll take it when it does come,—we

must do some walking here, or we'll forget we *have* limbs!

The telephone on table rings. MRS. PRESCOTT
answers it.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Hello, Brother . . . Yes, Hildegarde's here now.

HILDEGARDE

Eric! Oh, *please* let me talk to him! (*Runs to the telephone*) Eric! Yes, Mother and I are down here for three whole weeks! For a country mouse like me this city life is one continuous thrill! Went out riding in a taxi today,—*all alone!* And my little mother strayed away from me, and got lost,—but *I* found her! . . . Coming in ten minutes? Goody! Goody! Try and make it *eight*,—goodbye! (*She dances lightly and airily about the room*) Oh, won't it be *entrancing* to see Eric again!

MRS. MORRIS

(*Laughing*) Laura, can your younger brother possibly be Hildegarde's hero still?

HILDEGARDE

(*In warm defence*) Wouldn't it be a funny girl who didn't *adore* a big cousin who taught her

to ride and play tennis, and hit the bullseye at twenty paces with a revolver! Don't you honestly think, Cousin Laura, Eric's about the most perfect man in the world,—next to Father, of course!

MRS. PRESCOTT

To be sure; — and nowadays perfect men are needles in haystacks!

HILDEGARDE

(*Excitedly*) Mother, I want to look my best, and I've thought up a way to surprise Eric. Do come up soon and help me,—there's a ducky lambkin! (*She takes her mother's coat and hers with her*) I'll take yours up with me. And just wait till you see that shawl! It'll freeze the 'O' right off the O'Halligan!

Goes out light-heartedly.

MRS. PRESCOTT

(*They sit opposite each other, as they fashion the "leis"*) Well, Jinny, you have some excuse for being a flustered old hen with your one chick!

MRS. MORRIS

I'm really concerned about her,—what's best to do. Her father has been after me for six

months, Laura, to inform her fully,— about *life*. He says it's my duty as a mother of a really pretty girl, though there's no such desperate hurry for the Mammias of the plain ones! But then every girl is pretty to her mother.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Ridiculous of Miles: — her life is so sheltered.

MRS. MORRIS

I know: — and I couldn't bear to tell her,— she's so innocently happy.

MRS. PRESCOTT

She's too young.

MRS. MORRIS

Seventeen tomorrow.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Just at the dawn. And knows nothing of — life?

MRS. MORRIS

Only a little; I've told her some facts about parenthood.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Parenthood; — telling her only where there's been a marriage, I hope?

MRS. MORRIS

(*Scandalized by the mere idea*) Of course, Laura!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Is that all you've told her?

MRS. MORRIS

(*Hesitating*) No, I've told her a little about the relationship of husband and wife, explaining just as my mother did to me,—a kind of sacrament to bring children into families.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Quite right,—and it's even more than she needs at her age.

MRS. MORRIS

Of course she doesn't relate this to anything — er — *outside* of marriage, or dream there's any danger anywhere. Now Miles wants me to explain further, and that there are bad men in the world, and all that; he says I must put her on her guard. Do you think there's any special need?

MRS. PRESCOTT

Not with a girl sheltered like Hildegarde. . . . You've told her a great deal now! I'm sure it's much more than your mother had told you when

you were Hildegarde's age,—if Aunt Jane felt the way my mother did.

MRS. MORRIS

Yes, until my engagement Mother had told me absolutely nothing.

MRS. PRESCOTT

See, Jinny! You're a frightfully advanced woman for your mother's generation! And *she* probably was for our grandmother's! I've no doubt Grandma let our mothers marry in utter ignorance. Go slow. Knowledge of evil would come as a terrible shock to Hildegarde now. She's so radiant in her innocence! It's been only two days that you've been down on this visit, but already your child has filled my home with a new atmosphere. She's like a perfect flower opening in the early sunlight. And do you know what it is? It's the power of her youth, undimmed because she doesn't know *too much* about life.

MRS. MORRIS

Still when she disappeared today, and then returned so independent and without fear,—I almost wished she knew.

MRS. PRESCOTT

She'll never run away again since you've just told her not to get separated like that. And could you pick out a more unfortunate time to tell her than just at the beginning of her visit! How painfully self-conscious she'd be meeting all the young people down here! And at her birthday dance tomorrow!

MRS. MORRIS

But before long —

MRS. PRESCOTT

Oh, preserve the peach bloom while you can. It never comes again!

MRS. MORRIS

When we get quietly at home though I'll talk it all over with Miles.

MRS. PRESCOTT

You've told her more than most mothers I know, and I should rest satisfied.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Rising*) Well, I must run up now and see what Hilda's concocting to surprise Eric. She certainly thinks he's the cream of creation!

MRS. MORRIS *goes out by further door,— to left.*

ERIC *enters in a moment by the door at the right. He is a tall, active, well-bred man of thirty, alert, and buoyant; a man of much personal charm.*

ERIC

Hello, Sister!

MRS. PRESCOTT

So nice to see you, Eric. Men gone back to our ships yet?

ERIC

No: I'm starting South to corral more of these coy strike-breakers.

MRS. PRESCOTT

No more threats against your life lately, I hope?

ERIC

A few, but I go armed now. . . . Where's Hildegard? . . . I got over here in seven minutes — to please her.

MRS. PRESCOTT

She's on tiptoe to see you. . . . How the years have swept by since Jinny married the good college professor and turned her back on the city.

And to think her child is almost a young woman now!

ERIC

Isn't little Hilda wonderful? My visits up at Clarendon and my whole relationship with her has been the sweetest part of my whole life.

MRS. PRESCOTT

You should have married and had sweeter,— why don't you?

ERIC

Suppose I've already somebody in mind?

MRS. PRESCOTT

No! — Tell me!

ERIC

Suppose Cousin Jinny's daughter?

MRS. PRESCOTT

(Startled, and dropping the "lei" she is working on) Hildegarde! Why she's a mere child!

ERIC

Children have one extraordinary habit,— they grow up,— in time.

MRS. PRESCOTT

You're not serious?

ERIC

But I am. . . . Hasn't it been this one little girl sprite who has kept any other love away from me? Haven't I, first as a shy boy, watched her develop from a rose petal of a baby to a merry little grig of a child, and now see her beginning to bloom, a sweet challenge to me to woo and win her? And I'll take my first chance!

MRS. PRESCOTT

She's ridiculously young; you shan't put any such notions into her head now!

ERIC

Want to bet I can't?

MRS. PRESCOTT

I'll sit here with you, and I'm sure you'll behave. But there's another reason why you shan't make love to her now. I've learned lately of an obstacle —

ERIC

Don't tell me there's some old family skeleton of ours I've never been properly introduced to!

MRS. PRESCOTT

No *family* skeleton; I've learned lately that *you've* been —

The door opens, and HILDEGARDE'S voice is heard hesitatingly.

HILDEGARDE

Cousin Laura?

MRS. PRESCOTT

Just Eric and I are here, dear.

HILDEGARDE *comes tripping in, wearing a very charming, girlish party dress, with light dainty slippers, etc., to match. The dress is cut out prettily at the throat. Her hair is put up youthfully. She flies over to ERIC, and kisses him with childish joy.*

HILDEGARDE

Oh! Oh! Oh! You dear darling Cousin Eric! It's a whole long five months since you've been up to see Father and Mother and me!

ERIC

(*Admiring her*) Why, little bird, flying off to a party today?

HILDEGARDE

No, but I put my new pair of wings on just to show you, Eric, because you can't be at my birthday dance tomorrow.

ERIC

Charming of you!

HILDEGARDE

(*Clapping her hands*) My very first low-neck gown!

MRS. PRESCOTT *having finished the favors, takes up a book, but keeps an eye on ERIC.*

ERIC

What wouldn't I give to see you wear it to-morrow evening!

HILDEGARDE

I did want you so, but Cousin Laura said you'd just delight in putting all the boys' noses out of joint!

MRS. PRESCOTT

I thought I'd invite only the girls and boys of Hildegard's own age, Eric.

ERIC

Why, Laura, when I'm a boy myself!

HILDEGARDE *gets one of the garlands from the table, throws it over her neck, and dances about room, humming a waltz tune.*

HILDEGARDE

This is one of the dances we're to have tomorrow,—like it? (*She gaily flings another lei of a different color over ERIC's head*) Come, Eric, have one dance with me! (*They dance gracefully, while HILDEGARDE hums the tune*) It would be lots more fun if you were coming.

ERIC

(*At the close of the dance*) Why your braid's up! — What a young lady you're getting to be!

MRS. PRESCOTT

(*Looking up from her book*) Yes, and young ladies should be very chary of their kisses, Hilda!

HILDEGARDE

I'll never be too grown up to want to kiss Eric!

ERIC

(*With a triumphant glance at his sister*) That's the resolve every girl should make,—for just one man!

MRS. PRESCOTT

See here, Eric,—you both are too old for nonsense.

ERIC

But not for birthdays,—are we, Hilda?
D'you suppose by any chance there might be a
present somewhere round here for you, little 'un?

HILDEGARDE

If there is,— I'll find it!

*She puts her hand into his coat pocket and
draws out a .38 caliber revolver.*

ERIC

I'd forgotten that for the moment.

HILDEGARDE

(Looking at it in dismay) Another revolver
this birthday?

ERIC

Don't cloud up so,—it's mine. What's your
opinion as an expert?

HILDEGARDE

(Handles it skillfully, and opens it) A beauty!
And all loaded! Why,—in the city?

ERIC

(With mock grandeur) I'm of such conse-
quence I've received a permit!

HILDEGARDE

But there aren't any targets.

ERIC

(*Laughs heartily as he takes it back*) Why the joke is,— that *I'm* the target!

MRS. PRESCOTT

His business keeps him very late in a rough part of town.

HILDEGARDE

(*Anxious for him*) What dangers there must be here we don't have in the country!

ERIC

You'd never guess what I've got Hilda dear, for someone. Tell me, if anything could be more exciting than this for the seventeenth anniversary of a very dear young lady?

Takes a jewelry box out of his other coat pocket.

EDWARDS *comes in.*

EDWARDS

The caterer, Madame, some questions about to-morrow night.

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MRS. PRESCOTT

Excuse me; but (*meaningly to ERIC*) I'll be back in a minute, Eric. Edwards, tell Mrs. Morris that Mr. Hamilton's here.

HILDEGARDE

Mother knows, Cousin Laura, but she's just lost to the world,—she's writing her daily letter to Father!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Tell Mrs. Morris, Edwards, that Mr. Hamilton is *very* anxious to see her just as soon as she can come down.

EDWARDS *goes out.*

ERIC

(*Calls goodnaturedly as MRS. PRESCOTT goes out*) Checkmate! (*He holds the box tantalizingly over her head; HILDEGARDE reaches for it prettily*) The golden apple hangs high!

HILDEGARDE

Please! Please don't be so dreadfully poky! ERIC *lets down the box within reach, but retains his hold for a few seconds, when after a little childlike struggle he lets her take it.*

HILDEGARDE

(*Losing no time in opening it*) Oh-h! Oh!
A string of pearls! (*Throws her arms about*
ERIC's neck and gives him an enthusiastic kiss)
You darling! You always think of just the thing
I want most!

ERIC

(*Controlling himself with difficulty*) I wish
I dared whisper the thing I want most!

HILDEGARDE

What is it?

ERIC

Haven't you guessed that it's your,—love?

HILDEGARDE

You funny man! Haven't I always loved you
ever since I was a little chit,—right next to my
father and mother?

ERIC

I want more!

HILDEGARDE

More than *that!* — you're greedy!

ERIC

Promote me to the head of the list, Hilda!
MRS. MORRIS comes in as ERIC takes HILDE-

GARDE'S *hand and kisses it in most loverlike fashion.*

HILDEGARDE

(*Not comprehending, but loyally*) Above my father and mother? — Not a bit of it!

MRS. MORRIS

Eric!

ERIC

(*Shaking hands warmly with her, but embarrassed*) How are you, Jinny,— I'm terribly glad to see you.

HILDEGARDE

(*Runs over with the pearl necklace to show her mother*) Aren't they simply *enchanting!* And to think they're really all my own, my very, very own! You dearest Cousin Eric!

MRS. MORRIS

(*Returning necklace to HILDEGARDE, which she puts on*) Very beautiful, darling; — too beautiful, Eric.

HILDEGARDE

I'll wear them tomorrow evening at the dance, and think of you, Eric, all the time.

ERIC

Do! I'd love to have you;—"all the time"
—don't forget!

MRS. MORRIS

Darling, I wish to have a word with Eric alone.

HILDEGARDE

(*Starting out*) Yes, mother. And perhaps
I'll find Maggie's shawl has come. Oh, it *must*
have!

ERIC

I'm leaving town, Hilda, but remember you're
all going with me to that box party at Peter Pan
Monday. I don't want to miss being on the spot
when you lose your heart to Maude Adams!

HILDEGARDE

(*Claps her hands, and dances happily about the
room*) Heavenly! The party tomorrow night,
—and my hair will be way up then, and all the
other happy times Cousin Laura's planning for us,
and seeing you again, dear Eric,—oh, isn't the
world the most glo-o-rious place to live in!
Goodbye,—just for today. (*She runs out, mer-
rily, and blowing a kiss to ERIC*) Catch it! —
if you can!

ERIC

(*Eying* MRS. MORRIS, *uncertain what she's going to say*) I'm ready, Jinny; but do you mind if I tell you I'm already booked for some kind of a scolding from Laura,—later on?

MRS. MORRIS

(*Quivering with indignation*) Eric! How could you make love to Hildegarde!

ERIC

Because, Jinny,—I want to marry Hildegarde.

MRS. MORRIS

And so you took advantage of her childish affection for you?

ERIC

Honestly, Jinny, I didn't mean to,—today; but she was irresistible.

MRS. MORRIS

A girl who hasn't even finished school yet!

ERIC

Now, Jinny,—my criminal record? Crime Number One,—I'm thirty; Crime Number Two,—I'm a bachelor!

MRS. MORRIS

Plenty of bachelors of thirty I'd never consider for *my* daughter.

ERIC

(*With sincerity*) Jinny, little Hilda has been absolutely the only woman in my whole life for me, and our affection has helped me struggle along till now.

MRS. MORRIS

I'm so glad, Eric,— for the other kind of man shall never have Hildegard! And frankly, I know only one objection,— Hildegard's own youth; and *that* I shall safeguard in every way!

ERIC

But — later?

MRS. MORRIS

Later you may enter the lists,— if no objections come up; but for the present — (MRS. PRESCOTT *returns*) I was just going to ask Eric, Laura, not to try to see Hildegard while we're staying here.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Eric! You didn't make love to Hildegard!

ERIC

Frost-nipped, right in the bud!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Jinny's right then. You mustn't come here till Hildegarde goes.

ERIC

What! Not see Hildegarde all the three weeks she's here!

MRS. MORRIS

I'm sorry, but I'm sure it's for the best, Eric, — for Hildegarde's own sake; goodbye.

She goes out.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Eric, you've no right to get Hildegarde interested in you,—or any other girl so sweet and young until you reform,—in one line.

ERIC

Some little sparrow been telling fibs about me? Wring its neck!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Your recent acquaintance with that man Lippely degrades you,—knowing what his vocation is.

ERIC

Has he got any? — That is, besides joining all the clubs his Daddy's pickle money gets him into?

MRS. PRESCOTT

I hear his vocation's drinking,— like a sponge.

ERIC

Never saw him turn a hair!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Walter says —

ERIC

O-ho! Your husband's the little sparrow!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Says his dinners are seas of champagne, and unfortunate guests carried out to their taxis singing and speechmaking,— how can you?

ERIC

Sing or speechify? — Why Laura, you know I can't do either!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Eric Hamilton, are you going to a dinner of Lippley's tomorrow night?

ERIC

Your husband, Walter Prescott, got the story partly right. I'm going to *try* to go. His dinners are marvelous,— I don't mean for the cham-

pagne,—but the rare things he gets hold of! And he gathers together a mighty interesting crowd of men,—which is the main attraction for me.

MRS. PRESCOTT

So you don't mind being one of the "*unfortunate* guests"!

ERIC

Laura! You've never heard of me being,—not myself?

MRS. PRESCOTT

Twice lately you've even come into my home, badly under the influence.

ERIC

I humbly beg your pardon, Laura. I'll never let that happen again. You see I can manage three glasses of champagne, but the fourth,—and it's ridiculous!—always makes the floor rise!

MRS. PRESCOTT

I realize you've been working terribly hard, but that's why you must not go where you'll be tempted.

ERIC

I've promised Lippley I'll go, if I can get back from the South on time.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Jinny and Hildegarde,— what if they should learn of your having been — drunk!

ERIC

Hildegarde! — She must never know!

MRS. PRESCOTT

There's only one way for her never to know,— stay on the safe side: — since it's three glasses,— respect your limitations, and be thankful you've got them! It's only been within the last month you've been going too far, Walter says. You can stop!

ERIC

(*Thinking it over*) After this I'll cut out Lippely altogether,— for Hildegarde's sake, and if necessary I'll move over to another club.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Fine! And you mean you'll begin tomorrow night?

ERIC

(*Taking out his watch*) Nearly train time,— no, I didn't.

MRS. PRESCOTT

But why not begin tomorrow night?

ERIC

Oh, if I should possibly get there, I'll wave off the seductive fourth glass,—in fact I'll never take too much again. The chances are tomorrow night that I'll be perched at some remote little railroad lunch counter, sharing my supper with a swarm of "busy curious flies,"—ugh!

EDWARDS *comes in with box done up in distinctive green paper.*

EDWARDS

Mrs. Oakes, asking for you and Mrs. Morris, Madame.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Show Mrs. Oakes up.

EDWARDS

And this package Miss Morris has been down to ask me about has just come.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Take it up when you tell Mrs. Morris, and then bring tea.

EDWARDS *goes out with box.*

ERIC

(*Pausing as he starts out*) How's this for a square bargain, Laura? If you'll lower the pro-

hibitive tariff on Hildegarde, and permit a little reciprocity,— say let me see her every two days, — I'll cut down the total consumption of alcohol for the United States this year, by *not* going to Lippley's dinner!

MRS. PRESCOTT

(*Laughs*) You are a boy, after all, Eric! But that's not a fair offer,— when you think you'll be at that remote little lunch counter anyway! Seriously you must not see Hildegarde,— since you forgot yourself and made love to the child. . . . By the way, where can we reach you if anything turns up about the business?

ERIC

(*A little piqued*) Going South: anywhere I can get strike breakers;— haven't any address. Adios, Laurita. Tell Hilda how sorry I am I can't go to Peter Pan. But I'll send you over the tickets Monday.

Goes out, bowing courteously to MRS. MORRIS as she comes in.

MRS. MORRIS

Edwards has just brought up that shawl, and it's far too beautiful for Maggie! Hildegarde's

a ridiculous child sometimes! Spent twenty-three dollars for it!

MRS. PRESCOTT

I'll have Edwards mail it later.

MRS. MORRIS

You're too kind. Do you think Martha Oakes would like to see Hildegarde?

MRS. PRESCOTT

Yes, but you mightn't like to have Hildegarde meet Martha;— for if she gets started to talking about her work, she'll say things that are improper for young girls to hear.

MRS. OAKES *comes in, shown in by EDWARDS:*
she's a handsome city woman, quietly dressed;
of same age and social birth as the other two;
the best type of city woman who is going into
social service today. They all greet each
other warmly.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Just delighted to see you, Martha!

MRS. MORRIS

Martha! Martha! We three old school-mates!

MRS. OAKES

I couldn't resist getting a peep at you, Jinny, on the way to my office.

MRS. MORRIS

Your husband's bank?

MRS. OAKES

No, the society I'm working in. I've a room of my own there now, and oh, I'm so deeply interested in the work!

MRS. MORRIS

Just what sort is it, Martha?

MRS. OAKES

Cases connected with the social evil.

EDWARDS *comes in with tea, and soon retires.*

MRS. PRESCOTT

(*Pouring tea*) Her work, Jinny, is among girls who are depraved.

MRS. OAKES

Among the unfortunate, dear Jinny.

HILDEGARDE *looks through the open door. She has the large green package with the shawl in it, and her hat and jacket on to go out;*

she carries an umbrella and her handbag. The others are busy about the tea table and do not notice her.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Oh, come, come, Martha, there's always an instinct for evil in girls who go into the — er — gay life.

HILDEGARDE takes a step as if to come in, then hesitates as she sees they are busy, with MRS. OAKES, a stranger to her. She decides not to interrupt her mother and steals quietly out with the box, without having been observed.

MRS. OAKES

Many a girl, Laura, has taken her first step down because her mother had an *instinct* for *silence*. It is heartbreaking to think of it,— for the lack of just one word of warning! Why from fifteen years of work I know that an ignorant attractive young girl is not safe alone on the streets of our great cities.

MRS. PRESCOTT

(*Impatiently*) No young girl of our class does go out on our streets alone.

MRS. OAKES has finished her cup of tea, and has risen and is standing by the window.

MRS. OAKES

Don't imagine it's only the daughters of the poor who get caught. (*Looks out of the window*) Why there's a very nicely dressed young girl, just crossing the street now, carrying a package; she's evidently of "our class." I hope *that* girl knows! . . . What I mean, Jinny, is that there are countless snares for the ignorant. . . . She's turned the corner now.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Uneasily*) Snares? What kind, Martha?

MRS. OAKES

A *hundred* kinds of snares to catch the ignorant. Many are appeals to the natural feelings or quick sympathies of girls. All kinds of friendly advances made by nice looking young men, or even women of apparently good class,—and fake lovers who later sell their victims like cattle. Why we even have cases where the bait is flowers or candies that have been drugged!

MRS. PRESCOTT

Terrible; but what can *we* do about it?

MRS. OAKES

Every one of us is responsible who is afraid to speak boldly on the great sex problems,— just think of the fathers and mothers we know ourselves, who are afraid to tell their children! We build a great wall of silence about our boys and girls, but they climb right over it, and learn elsewhere, somehow, sometime.

MRS. MORRIS

Then, you'd advise every mother to tell her daughters all of this,— and the evil too?

MRS. OAKES

Jinny, you wouldn't ask if you knew of the endless procession of girls who get caught by this life, who really had no notion of what was in store for them. And when they learned, it was too late! That's why we've got to save the girls *before*,— and not just rescue them *after*.

MRS. MORRIS

I think you're right, Martha,— you're convincing me.

MRS. OAKES

(*Impassioned*) If only the mothers who are so loving but blind would understand the dangers

which are lurking for their own flesh and blood! . . . Dangers from men of their own class, and from this consuming plague of white slavery! Every parent must tell the children frankly the whole truth about sex,—what a precious gift it is, to be kept sweet and pure and holy. And I believe we're standing at the dawn of a new day of truth,—it's coming soon, that day when we shall no longer be cowards before our own children! . . . Please do forgive me for talking so much about my work,—I've been dreadfully rude. Didn't Hildegarde come down with you? How she must have changed since I saw her here eight years ago! Tell me how she is, Jinny.

MRS. MORRIS

Almost grown up now. She's upstairs,—I'll go and get her.

MRS. OAKES

(Looking at her watch and rising) I'm so sorry, but I must hurry off now,—I've an appointment at the court. But I'll be in again soon to see Hildegarde and both of you.

MRS. PRESCOTT *rings the bell. Mutual good-byes. EDWARDS appears and takes* MRS. OAKES *down.*

MRS. MORRIS

(*Moving restlessly about*) If she'd been telling all this while Hilda was out on her taxi adventure, I should have been distracted.

MRS. PRESCOTT

This time you can't worry, since you know Hildegarde's safely upstairs. . . . Have another cup, Jinny?

MRS. MORRIS

No, thank you.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Martha's a fine woman! — but — such cases! Imagine Hildegarde taking candy from a stranger! Or letting herself be approached by one of these men of the street corners!

MRS. MORRIS

No, I can't, but Martha must know what she's talking about; and I'm convinced I ought to tell Hildegarde; — did you hear her say there were a hundred ways to catch the ignorant?

MRS. PRESCOTT

Not yet! Leave the peach bloom on for a little while longer.

MRS. MORRIS

Now! I shall take the time, Laura, there is before dinner.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Oh, very well; she's not my child. How dark it's become! (*Going to the window*) Why, it's raining!

Steps back and turns on electric lights.

MRS. MORRIS

(*At the door*) I won't be one of those mothers Martha spoke about a single minute longer! *She goes out.*

EDWARDS *comes in by other door; starts to take tea things; stops with tray in his hands.*

EDWARDS

Excuse me, Madame, but I can't help being a bit concerned about the young lady.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Who? — Not Miss Morris?

EDWARDS

Yes, she said she'd be back in no time, and it's turning dark now.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Back; — from where?

EDWARDS

Miss Morris stepped out some while ago to mail that box she was so anxious about. I said I'd be glad to do the service for her later on when I was free, but she said 'twould have to go at once, or the person wouldn't get it on time.

MRS. MORRIS *comes in hastily with her hat and coat in her hands. She is almost tragically worried.*

MRS. MORRIS

I can't find Hildegarde!

MRS. PRESCOTT

She went out, Edwards says, to mail that wretched shawl!

EDWARDS

She came to me at the door, and asked the way. I told her 'twasn't a minute's walk. That was quite a while back, Madame.

MRS. MORRIS

She went *alone?*

EDWARDS

Yes, Madame, she said you were busy, and she wouldn't trouble anybody; that she'd like the walk and she was used to going to the post-office at home alone.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Putting on her things*) You don't suppose something's happened to her!

In her nervousness she drops her umbrella with a clatter.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Oh, she'll be back in a minute, and come running in just as she did half an hour ago, laughing and shaking her finger at you!

MRS. MORRIS

I'm not sure she will,— I'm going out to look for her.

MRS. PRESCOTT

Hildegarde's probably just taken a wrong turn; but we'll all get ready and go out; and we'll find her,— never fear!

MRS. MORRIS

(*Starting out the door frightened*) I can't wait! I'm going now, and I'll find my child!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A paved, asphalt city residential street, with a block of substantial, luxurious houses opposite; at the left a side street runs at right angles back out of view. A sharp shower has made everything wet. It is still drizzling now. It is about fifteen minutes since HILDEGARDE left the PRESCOTTS' home. The storm clouds have made it unnaturally dark. It is a little before the city lights are turned on.

HILDEGARDE comes walking down the main street from the right, in company with a gray-haired, well-gowned woman in her early fifties. HILDEGARDE is holding her umbrella carefully over the stranger's head. In a moment HILDEGARDE stops.

HILDEGARDE

I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid I must turn back. My mother might be anxious if I were out much longer.

STRANGER

My home's only a step further,—the third house there,—and it's still raining.

HILDEGARDE

Oh,— I'll gladly take you that far.

They start again.

STRANGER

You've certainly saved me a wetting, and been very kind to an older woman,— and a stranger to you; — that makes it all the kinder of you!

HILDEGARDE

I'm only too glad I could help you.

STRANGER

I hope your mother won't be disturbed at the little extra time I've taken.

HILDEGARDE

She would be soon; you see I left word I'd be back in no time at all.

A POLICEMAN comes walking down the side street, in rubber coat, etc., turns the corner, and walks toward them. He looks hard at the two, especially when he hears HILDEGARDE speak.

HILDEGARDE

Let me see; I've come one block over and one up; so I can get back to the Avenue by going less than two blocks from here?

STRANGER

That's exactly right, my dear.

POLICEMAN *meets the STRANGER's eyes, and goes straight past; then stops and turns to look as they stand at the foot of the entrance steps. The STRANGER with her eye on the POLICEMAN drops her handbag, which takes a moment for HILDEGARDE to pick up and return to her. The POLICEMAN shrugs his shoulders and disappears down his beat without turning about again.*

STRANGER

If you'll be so very good as to see me up to the door.

HILDEGARDE

Certainly!

They go up the steps together.

STRANGER

You said,—“Your mother?” You live in the city then?

HILDEGARDE

Oh dear no, we've just come down from up the state for a visit,—for the first time in years! I love the city!

STRANGER

(*At the door*) Do stop a moment and have a cup of tea to warm you.

She pushes the bell three times sharply.

HILDEGARDE

Oh no, thank you, just as much.

The door is half opened by PETER, a huge, swarthy man in livery.

The STRANGER takes HILDEGARDE by the hand and shakes it warmly.

STRANGER

Goodbye, and thank you again, my dear.

Still holding HILDEGARDE's hand as she glances up and down the street.

HILDEGARDE

I must hurry. Goodnight.

Politely tries to take her hand from the STRANGER'S.

STRANGER

(*Who still retains HILDEGARDE's hand*)
Goodnight! (*Casually gets in between her and the steps. Nods backward to the man in the doorway. Says in a very ordinary tone of voice*)
Peter,— quick,— take her!

PETER reaches out a powerful arm about HILDEGARDE'S waist, and claps his other hand over her mouth; while the STRANGER instantly seizes HILDEGARDE'S open umbrella, cutting off the view by holding it between herself and the street. HILDEGARDE can just be glimpsed as she is pulled back into the house. The STRANGER quietly and leisurely lowers the umbrella as if nothing had happened. She gives another quick look up and down the vacant street, then goes in and shuts the door. There is silence. A minute afterward the infrequent lights of a quiet residential district flash on, and the wet pavements gleam.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The handsome sitting-room of a suite. A door opening into an inner room, and a main, massive entrance door. The windows have an ornamental grill-work inside, and the glass is not transparent, but ornamental also. The room is furnished with every appeal in the way of the material comforts of life: luxurious easy chairs, warm sensuous coloring throughout, even to the vari-colored electric light shades. Sofa and tables, fine paintings, and a curious cabinet with drawers. A fire is laid. Two minutes have elapsed.

The room is in the gloaming. The STRANGER, "MADAME," comes in, turns on lights, followed at once by PETER bearing HILDEGARDE in his arms, assisted by JURGEN, a tall footman in livery, who carries her feet. HILDEGARDE is struggling desperately but vainly.

MADAME

(In soft voice) Put her down,—easy now —
on that chair.

They put her in large, low easy chair. PETER, with his hand still over her mouth, stands behind HILDEGARDE.

MADAME

Now be quiet, dearie, and he'll take his hand away.

Nods to PETER, who lifts his hand. HILDEGARDE gets out a good scream.

HILDEGARDE

Help! Help!

PETER smothers the next cry into a gurgle.

MADAME

Humph! Hurry and get some cord, Jurgen, and a clean handkerchief.

JURGEN goes out.

MADAME

I'm so sorry you make this necessary, my dear, but ours is a quiet street. I hate to have to do what I'm going to, but you're such a lively little piece.

JURGEN returns with cord.

MADAME

Feet!

JURGEN *swiftly crosses HILDEGARDE's feet and ties them.*

MADAME

Hands!

They tie HILDEGARDE's hands behind her back.

MADAME

The handkerchief?

JURGEN *hands it to her, and MADAME deliberately makes a large knot in it, then signs to PETER, who lifts his hand, and she dexterously slips knot into HILDEGARDE's mouth. Takes her own scarf off and hands it to PETER.*

PETER *swathes it across HILDEGARDE's mouth, and ties it behind her head. HILDEGARDE makes muffled cries.*

MADAME

Tighter. Tighter. There:—very good, Peter. Now get back to the door.

PETER *hurries out.*

MADAME

(*Very quietly*) I'll be back later when you come to your senses. (*She starts out, followed*

by JURGEN. *At the door she stops, fussing with the lock*) See here, Jurgen, this key won't catch.

JURGEN

(*Trying it*) Lock's worn smooth, I guess, Madame.

MADAME

Well, the bolt'll have to do for tonight, then; first thing tomorrow we'll have a new lock on.

They go out, and the bolt is shot.

HILDEGARDE, *left alone, for some minutes struggles in vain with her bonds, but at last works one hand free; then the other; she frees her mouth from its gag, then unties her feet. She starts up panting, and begins a desperate search for escape. The main door bolted, the inner door at right locked, the grill work at the windows all bar her way. At last she begins pounding on the main door with her two fists.*

HILDEGARDE

Let me out! Let me out! Help! Help! Help!

The bolt is withdrawn, and MADAME enters; her coat and hat are off, and her gown is seen to be very rich. Her hair is elaborately coif-

fured. She wears a silver chatelaine at her side. She looks like a person of good class, and is almost distinguished in her appearance.

MADAME

(Gripping the girl's arm, but speaking softly and with the repression of power) Please! No noise! *Who* took these off?

HILDEGARDE

I did.

MADAME

Quite athletic!

HILDEGARDE

How dared you put them on me!

MADAME

Highty, tighty, my girlie. A little more respect if you please!

HILDEGARDE

Tell me *why* I'm here!

MADAME

Here? Because you chose to come here, dearie.

HILDEGARDE

That's a lie, and you know it!

MADAME

(*Soft voiced, but taking hold of HILDEGARDE'S wrist firmly*) Now we want to be good friends, but you must never forget that I'm mistress here, — as you saw.

HILDEGARDE

What are you locking me up for,— I suppose for ransom?

MADAME

(*Quickly accepting the idea*) Of course,— for ransom.

HILDEGARDE

How much do you expect for me?

MADAME

You're worth,— a great deal.

HILDEGARDE

My family aren't millionaires,— why did you think they were? Because of my necklace?

MADAME

Perhaps I did. (*Fingering it. Says a bit condescendingly*) It is genuine, and very pretty.

HILDEGARDE

It's a birthday present today that I'd put on and forgotten to take off.

MADAME

Your nineteenth birthday, you said.

HILDEGARDE

Why, I'm not seventeen till tomorrow, and anyway I never mentioned it to you.

MADAME

You've forgotten, but *I* never forget anything.

HILDEGARDE

You haven't told me how much you're going to ask Father and Mother for me; — I must write at once.

MADAME

No hurry. A little anxiety helps.

HILDEGARDE

But it'll be tomorrow morning before a letter can possibly reach either of them unless you let me telephone my Mother now.

MADAME

(*Laughs*) Phone! Why, my dear, we won't even write for a fortnight or so, and the sooner you make up your mind to that —

HILDEGARDE

Oh, Mother would be nearly crazy not knowing I was *really* safe; — she might think I'd been run over! Please, please, I'll give you my *necklace extra*, if you let me send word tonight.

Unclasps her necklace and proffers it.

MADAME

It looks very girlish on you,— so keep it. And your father and mother are quite a long distance from the city?

HILDEGARDE

Father is — it's six whole hours by train, but Mother came down with me,— oh, *don't* make me wait!

MADAME

We must have time to arrange the proper terms.

HILDEGARDE

All the terms can be arranged now right here in the city through our cousins. . . . Oh, what will Mother and Cousin Laura think if I don't come back tonight!

MADAME

Now get calm. Your friends will hear just as soon as I think best, and not before. Meanwhile you'll be very comfortable here with me.

HILDEGARDE

But —

MADAME

I've explained, and I'd rather not have any more talk! Have you taken a look 'round? . . . An elegant bedroom. (*Takes a key from chatelaine, and unlocks inner door*) This is the one door in,—and out. And a window just like these others, notice. And a private dressing-room. (*Opening a door within the inner bedroom*) Take a look at those mirrors; do you know they cost me a cool six hundred dollars!

HILDEGARDE

I don't care about your rooms,—you're a wicked bad woman! What have my parents ever done to *you*? You ought to be sent to jail for kidnapping!

MADAME

(*Laughs, not ill-naturedly*) Your ginger is refreshing; only remember *my* appetite for it has a limit. Guess you haven't had anything to eat since lunch?

HILDEGARDE

No, and I won't touch anything.

MADAME

I've ordered some tea for you. Later on the man will bring up dinner; — better than you ever ate. Our chef is straight French imported goods!

There is a knock at the door, which MADAME answers. JURGEN comes in with tea tray, dainty china, attractive sandwiches, tea service, etc., and a decanter of rum.

JURGEN

Dolly says a gentleman wants you on the telephone, Madame.

MADAME

(*To HILDEGARDE*) Excuse me, my dear. Light the young lady's fire, Jurgen, and make it cheery. (*She goes out.*)

JURGEN *sets tray down on large table, draws up a small low tea table before the fire, sets the tray conveniently on that, and lights the fire.*

HILDEGARDE

(*Hesitating*) Do you know why I'm here?

JURGEN

(*Laughs*) I wouldn't lose if I made a bet on it!

HILDEGARDE

Then won't you help me get away? My father and mother will be terribly —

JURGEN

Nothin' doin'.

HILDEGARDE

Think how *your* mother would feel, if your sister were held for ransom,— for weeks!

JURGEN

Don't hand *me* any line of soft talk!

HILDEGARDE

Oh-h! (*Growing older in experience*) Perhaps,— money?

JURGEN

Didn't you hear me say,—“ Nothin' doin' ”? (*Goes to hall door, opens it, looks up and down the passage way. Comes back, and over to HILDEGARDE*) Well,— what's your proposition?

HILDEGARDE

You get me out of here right away, and I'm sure my parents will give you a whole five hundred dollars instead of that bad woman getting any!

JURGEN

(*Contemptuously*) Five hundred! — You stay and fix it up with her!

HILDEGARDE

That's just the point. She won't let my parents know a word about me for two weeks anyway. Of course I'm not afraid here for myself, but meanwhile my mother will —

Choking down a sob.

JURGEN

If your folks feel that bad, they won't stop at no mean little five hundred!

HILDEGARDE

Well, I think they might pay a thousand to get me back.

JURGEN

(*Pausing*) Naw; — that's nearer, but not worth getting Madame and her friends sore on me; — I've got ambitions!

HILDEGARDE

Then fifteen hundred, but I can't promise more, — I don't know so very much about money —

JURGEN

Fifteen hundred,—hum'm'm'm,—it's not half enough, but I'll consider. And when your parents find you really safe, they'll be glad to hand the man who got you out of here an extra five hundred. Mind, when you're out, don't never say I had nothing to do with getting you in, but remember I was just the soft-hearted feller that saved yer,—promise!

HILDEGARDE

Oh yes, yes,—anything, and please, please, how soon can you get me out,—*now?*

JURGEN

My only chance'd be tonight. You heard what she said about the new key?

HILDEGARDE *nods.*

JURGEN

Well, tomorrow morning there'll be a new lock put on, and *she* always carries the key to this room herself, or else Dolly,—you couldn't touch her heart w'atever you'd offer!

HILDEGARDE

(*Excitedly*) Tonight is fine! Oh, thank you so — so much!

JURGEN

There's only a bolt tonight —

HILDEGARDE

And you can slip it when no one sees?

JURGEN

'Tain't all so easy's it sounds. I go on the door for a short stretch at four A. M., when things are quiet. Now *then's* the time when the bolt has got to be slipped.

HILDEGARDE

I'll be ready.

JURGEN

But I daresn't come up. My feet are too heavy. Madame's got ears like a cat,—and Dolly's just as sharp.

HILDEGARDE

What can we do then?

JURGEN

Get somebody in with us. There's only one who would,—that's Rosie. She was soft once before, but Lord knows if she'll want to go in for it again. No harm asking, for she'd never peach on me.

HILDEGARDE

Then I shall be free tomorrow! If this kind Miss Rosie will help.

JURGEN

Free termorrer? — Not much; *then* we two'll get into a cab — for I'll have to quit my job right then and there — and we'll go to a flat of friends of mine, and you'll be *free*, young Miss, if your friends come across all right with the *cash!*

HILDEGARDE

(*Draws back doubtingly*) I don't know about going among any more strangers.

JURGEN

Losing your nerve?

HILDEGARDE

No,— but —

JURGEN

It's your one chance,— believe me. Take it or leave it.

HILDEGARDE

(*Desperately*) I'll take it.

JURGEN

That's business. Now what's the party's name?

HILDEGARDE

My father is John Miles Morris, Professor of Greek at the college in Clarendon.

JURGEN

Where's that?

HILDEGARDE

Why don't you know! — And it's in this state!

JURGEN

Well, I guess I can remember. (*Warningly*) Now as you vally your skin, don't make no slips or noises!

HILDEGARDE

How shall I know just what to do?

JURGEN

You'll hear either from Rosie or me,—if Madame's out of the way. (*Starts to go out, but turns back. Points to her handbag*) Got any coin there?

HILDEGARDE

Yes,—some.

JURGEN

How much?

HILDEGARDE

(*Looking into the bag*) A little over twenty dollars.

JURGEN

Madame knows?

HILDEGARDE

No, but she *did* see my necklace.

JURGEN

Hand it over.

JURGEN *takes the bag from her, and empties it; turns it upside down; an envelope falls out; he pinches it to see if there's any bill in it; then puts envelope back, and returns bag to HILDEGARDE.*

JURGEN

I'll keep this, just to show I b'lieve you're on the square; — I'll count it off as first payment on the fifteen hundred.

He goes out.

HILDEGARDE *shakes and examines empty bag thoroughly, then looks at the door in which*

JURGEN *has shot the bolt, and says with tightened lips.*

HILDEGARDE

Harpy!

She takes off her necklace and hides it in the cabinet.

The door is softly unbolted; JURGEN comes in, followed very quietly by ROSIE. She is a very pretty girl of twenty, whose looks are just beginning to lose their freshness; she is gentle, rather weary in manner; her dress is handsome, and décolleté; she is elaborately coiffured and manicured, yet she has dignity, refinement and spirituality. She is wearing a large and noticeably pretty locket.

JURGEN

(*Pointing to HILDEGARDE*) This is the new young lady I spoke about. I'll be back, Rosie, to let you out; now be awful quiet.

Goes out and slips bolt on them.

ROSIE

I'm glad to make your acquaintance.

HILDEGARDE

Thank you. . . . Are you "Rosie"?

ROSIE

They call me that here.

HILDEGARDE

Are you that woman's daughter?

ROSIE

The Madame? No, I'm one of her girls.

HILDEGARDE

One of them? How many are there?

ROSIE

Seven,— eight now that the house is full.

HILDEGARDE

Eight! Does she conduct a business of ransom?

ROSIE

She conducts,— a business. Tell me how you got into this house?

HILDEGARDE

I brought that woman to the door under my umbrella and they caught me.

ROSIE

What were you doing out alone anyway?

HILDEGARDE

I'd just run out for a moment to mail a particular package off to my old nurse. I was starting back when "Madame" as you call her, asked so pleasantly to walk with me. She'd been in the store buying stamps just before me, and was standing in the doorway when I came out.

ROSIE

Of all the mean tricks!

HILDEGARDE

(*Almost sobbing*) And now you see, Miss Rosie, I can't get out of here for ever so long unless someone helps me.

ROSIE

I know; — *I* was in these rooms once.

HILDEGARDE

And she won't even send word to Mother and Father for two whole weeks!

ROSIE

I'm going to try to help you, little girl, because I needed help once, just like you.

HILDEGARDE

And wasn't there anyone who would?

ROSIE

No one . . . Now listen; I'll slip back the bolt on your door as soon after four o'clock as all is clear. This suite is two flights up at the very back; the next room forward belongs to Madame's right hand helper, between you and the stairs, and Madame's own room is right beneath yours. Carry your shoes and keep away from the banisters,—that side creaks.

HILDEGARDE

I'll take care; is there anything else?

ROSIE

Yes; don't let anybody carry off your street clothes under *any* excuse! You can't get away in the clothes they'll give you.

HILDEGARDE

Will they try that?

ROSIE

Sure to; maybe not before tomorrow, but watch out.

HILDEGARDE

I'll stay up all night.

ROSIE

Luckily, I don't think you'll be disturbed tonight. Madame was telephoning in her room, as I passed by a little while ago, and something she said made me stop and listen at her door. But don't let her guess why you stay up,—or Dolly!

HILDEGARDE

Who is Dolly?

ROSIE

Madame's right hand girl, the one next door; she's a "trusty," and it's her particular business to snoop around and snitch.

HILDEGARDE

I never heard of such a terrible place. Can't you send a message to my mother tonight?

ROSIE

Impossible. Anyway by the time your friends got their way in here they might not find you. . . . Now listen; one slip before Madame or this Dolly, and we two will have a reckoning you'll never forget! And remember, if either of them gets the scent, that Jurgen will throw us over like a flash!

HILDEGARDE

I'm afraid to trust him at all.

ROSIE

There's no other way; tomorrow night will be too late,—for more reasons than just the new key! But Jurgen will try it for enough money; he's got ambitions,—for a saloon license.

HILDEGARDE

Oh, to think I'm going to see Mother tomorrow morning! I can never thank you enough, Miss Rosie. How long were you kept in these rooms if nobody helped you out?

ROSIE

Three weeks, till my will was broken, and I stopped caring much. I hadn't any money to interest Jurgen.

HILDEGARDE

Did you do a kindness for Madame too?

ROSIE

No; I was a green little stenographer come to the city to earn my living.

HILDEGARDE

All alone?

ROSIE

Yes,—like thousands of others. I quit my first place when I saw what the kindness of the head of the office was leading up to; — I hadn't found another place by the end of the next week, and my boarding-house keeper turned me out. She suggested housework to fill in the time, and the employment agency sent me straight here.

HILDEGARDE

Your hands look so pretty; — how long have you been doing housework here?

ROSIE

I've been working here twelve months next August. S'sh! Till I'm sure it's Jurgen. . . . Skirts! (*Slips into inner room, saying*) Don't say you've seen me!

Shuts the inner door, except for a little crack.

DOLLY comes in, looking about sharply; a handsome, luxuriant young woman of twenty-three, out of a lower class than ROSIE; shrewd, capable, strong in makeup, without delicacy. Handsomely and very sensuously dressed in clothes more exaggerated than ROSIE'S, though neither's gown is flagrant,

DOLLY

All alone, eh? I'm looking for one of the girls,— of course she's not in here?

HILDEGARDE

(*Lying bravely*) No, I'm all alone.

DOLLY

Because you see that's strictly against the rules of the house. (*Looks at tea things*) Didn't your tea go to the right spot? Madame wanted me to find out.

HILDEGARDE

I didn't feel like it, thank you.

DOLLY

I could still eat if I knew I was to die tomorrow! (*Goes to tea table and eats little sandwiches and cakes with gusto*) U'm'm'm, you lose!

HILDEGARDE

What's your name, please?

DOLLY

I'm Dolly; what are you going to call yourself?

HILDEGARDE

My name's Hildegarde.

DOLLY

Drop it quick, and take something cozy. They always do in these ransom cases. (*Laughs, then having finished sandwiches, etc., feels teapot*) I'll have a cup if you don't object. You could be Kitty,—that's an attractive name, and we had a girl once who chose that;—or— (*Looking her over appreciatively*) *Babe* would fit you fine. Now which will you have?

HILDEGARDE

Thank you just as much. I like my own name best.

DOLLY

(*Lifting a decanter from the tray*) I'm glad they didn't forget the rum. (*She sniffs it, then pours a little out in the spoon and tastes it suspiciously*) It's all right:—and half the fun of tea is the rum. (*Fills up her cup liberally with the liquor*) Your name? Why, 'twould never do. Madame allows no publicity in a ransom case. *Babe* or *Kitty*? *Kitty* or *Babe*? Both sound cute. Which do you think is prettiest?

HILDEGARDE

Well, I think *Babe* is worse. But I won't have either!

DOLLY

Then you'll be our little Kitty. The other one was pretty too like you,—same color eyes and hair. She got to be real popular. And I'm taking a fancy to you right off. And I think you'll get to be mighty popular too.

HILDEGARDE

(*Faintly*) I'm much obliged.

DOLLY

Don't mention it. Have a cigarette on me?

HILDEGARDE

No, thank you.

DOLLY

(*Amused*) Perhaps you haven't seen a lady smoke before?

HILDEGARDE

They don't,—where I come from.

DOLLY

(*Seats herself leisurely on table, and crosses her knees*) Well,—watch me! (*Takes a cigarette from silver case, and smokes*) You certainly are comfortable here,—uh? — Got the A-I suite!

HILDEGARDE

That woman's already told me how much she paid for the mirrors.

DOLLY

Yes, these are rooms one doesn't want to leave, — or in fact *can't*, — eh? Been taking a look 'round? Like the windows?

HILDEGARDE

It's a prison!

DOLLY

Sure; — and you need it for some of these ransom cases, — when they first come. (*Laughs to herself*) But take it from me, it's no earthly use to try and get out. It's never been done from *this* house!

HILDEGARDE

Never?

DOLLY

Never. Madame's a keen one; she keeps no traitors in her house. So just accommodate yourself, and don't fuss. And it'll seem like home after a while.

HILDEGARDE

Yes, but in my case there won't be any "after a while"; that woman's promised to let me go home in about two weeks.

DOLLY

Don't I understand all about it! — And two weeks will be gone in no time, and you'll have a jolly good time here if you obey the Madame,— but she's hard as nails on them that give her trouble. There was a girl like that — right here in this identical room — only three months ago.

HILDEGARDE

What happened to her?

DOLLY

She wouldn't listen to any advice, but kept on fussing,— did the baby act till it most broke up my appetite, and then one night, with one of the girls helping her,— a softie! — she actually got down to the front hall, but u'm'm'm,— oh my!

HILDEGARDE

(Fascinated, like a little bird before a snake)
But — what?

DOLLY

But — *no* further! And both she and the other girl got what was coming to them all right. *(Makes a motion like swinging a whip)* Z-zip!
—*Peter's* got some arm!

HILDEGARDE

(*Recoiling as if struck herself*) Oh-h-h!

DOLLY

And since that no other girl has wanted to get out. And that girl's father and mother haven't seen her yet. But you won't make any fuss, so nothing like that will happen to you.

HILDEGARDE

Where is she now?

DOLLY

Oh, don't ask *me*: a week later she somehow managed to get some poison, *cyanide*, smuggled in to her; and then,—goodbye, little girl, goodbye!

HILDEGARDE

How horrible! But do all the girls who don't cause trouble get home as soon as their ransoms come?

DOLLY

(*Laughs heartily*) Sure they do, and their folks are just so glad to see them, and tell the whole town the little strayed lamb has got back! But d'you know, lots of the girls get so struck on

Madame and the gay life in our little burgh that you have to *put* 'em out when you want 'em to go!

HILDEGARDE

They don't even want to go *home*?

DOLLY

Pooh! How many girls who got the chance to stay here, would want to leave all this! There are only one or two ransom houses in the city up to our style,—some day you'll see our drawing-room downstairs, and meet Madame's swell friends; you'll have clothes from the best shops in town, servants to wait on you, and elegant food and champagne that's good enough for millionaires! Tough luck for you that you're going to leave us in two weeks! Any girl ought to be happy here if she isn't a fool and lets everybody get away with her money. That was the trouble with the other Kitty,—though she wasn't quite strong here (*tapping her forehead*), but then that's nothing uncommon in girls like her. Well, the other Kitty never could seem to get more'n a few dollars out of debt,—and ended dead broke —

HILDEGARDE

Ended?

DOLLY

Last we heard she was in a hospital,— sick in the charity ward! How's *that* for a comedown!

HILDEGARDE

I'm sorry, but I don't understand a quarter of what you've been saying; does that woman give the girls pocket money while she holds them till their ransom comes?

DOLLY

(*Shrieks with laughter*) You're the biggest little greenie I've met in months! Sure,— ten cents a day, and an extra nickel for Sunday school! But I must stop chinning and go tell the Madame how nicely you're getting on. You look lots more chipper. And you said that other girl, — her name's Rosie by the way,— wasn't here? — *No use* my looking into the other room?

HILDEGARDE *shakes her head.*

DOLLY

I believe you. You wouldn't hand me a lie, would you? (*She starts out. Turns warningly at door*) But don't forget the girl who fussed and never saw her parents again!

She goes out and slides the bolt.

ROSIE *comes in from bedroom.* HILDEGARDE
hurries to her.

HILDEGARDE

Did you hear her, Miss Rosie?

ROSIE

Some of it,—all I could through the door!
She thinks I'm here!

HILDEGARDE

I'm going to wait the two weeks.

ROSIE

Two weeks! My God, child, you can't! You
can't wait till tomorrow night!

HILDEGARDE

She says the girl who helps will suffer — ter-
ribly.

ROSIE

I know it.

HILDEGARDE

Oh-h-h, Rosie,—*you* were that other girl!
You shan't do it again!

ROSIE

I'll risk it, because I know if you don't get out tonight you'll wish you'd never been born.

HILDEGARDE

Why?

ROSIE

Get up your courage now and say you'll take your one chance. (*Nervously*) Jorgen's got to come soon, or we'll be caught together!

HILDEGARDE

I can't. It isn't only for myself now, but for you —

ROSIE

Listen hard, for I've got to tell you what I wasn't going to, and hoped you'd get out before you had to learn here. All this ransom talk is a lie,—it's just a blind to lead you quietly up to the slaughter,—you've been stolen for something else!

HILDEGARDE

Something else! For what?

ROSIE

For slavery!

HILDEGARDE

(*Incredulously*) *Slavery!* You're joking, Miss Rosie, there isn't any slavery in our country nowadays!

ROSIE

Yes there is, and be quiet while I tell you. It's slavery that ruins you body and soul. The kind from which you can never raise your head, never go home.

HILDEGARDE

There isn't *anything* my father and mother wouldn't take me home after!

ROSIE

Lucky girl,—if you're right! Most parents won't have a girl back. But you might be too *ashamed* ever to go. Tonight's your only chance. If you stay you can never get back to the girl you were before!

HILDEGARDE

What do you mean?

ROSIE

They'll sell you to men,—to man after man!

HILDEGARDE

Sell *me* to *men*?

ROSIE

Yes; each man in turn owns you absolutely. Anyone that woman sends up has bought you for so many dollars.

HILDEGARDE

(*Thoroughly frightened*) *Bought me,—* for what? You're driving me wild!

ROSIE

Don't you understand yet? — Oh, I hate to tell you! It's to make you his slave to his worst nature,— here with you alone. And there is no help for you, no matter how you suffer, and loathe him, and nearly die of shame!

HILDEGARDE

I can only guess,— but it *can't* be that!

ROSIE

(*Lowering her voice*) Little one,— do you understand what *being a wife* means?

HILDEGARDE

Yes, my mother has told me that, but you can't, — you can't mean —!

ROSIE

It's like that which you and I are here for,— for man after man,— hundreds of 'em!

HILDEGARDE

(*Aroused and terrified, but only half believing*) No! No! Men can't be so horrible!

ROSIE

Oh, yes they can,—and more than you'd believe.

HILDEGARDE

(*Stricken*) I never dreamed there was anything like that in the world.

ROSIE

It's one of the great instincts of life; beautiful in happy homes I suppose, where it means love and children, but brutal here; and in the places lower down the scale,—just beast-like!

HILDEGARDE

I can't believe it, I can't! — My mother never told me anything about such an evil.

ROSIE

True with thousands of girls who get caught by it!

HILDEGARDE

(*Sobbing*) Why didn't my mother tell me! Mother, Mother, why didn't you tell me?

ROSIE

So now you *will* go?

HILDEGARDE

Yes, yes. And you come too, come home with me!

ROSIE

(*Pleased*) I, dear child! I can't,—it would more than double the risk.

HILDEGARDE

You must. It's your one chance too.

ROSIE

My life's broken now; — it can't be mended. I'm too old to begin.

HILDEGARDE

Why, you can't be much more than thirty?

ROSIE

(*Smiles faintly*) Not quite twenty, child. One loses youth fast here,—especially if one never yields her real consent.

HILDEGARDE

But are all the girls for this wicked business *caught* like you and me?

ROSIE

Oh no, some are willing enough, like Dolly, and I've heard Madame began that way; one kind of pressure or another brings lots of others,—feeble-mindedness, and hunger, and getting betrayed by the man you love,—and oh, lots of ways; but even that doesn't supply enough for the demand, so there's a regular business of hunting girls down! And to some of the hunters it's a kind of a *game*! (*Goes to door to listen*) That man isn't back yet!

HILDEGARDE

I'll never rest when I'm safe till I get you out too, dear kind Miss Rosie. I can't see why you'd risk so much for me?

ROSIE

What made me first want to help you was that telephone call I listened to. There's a reason for your being undisturbed tonight — you're being saved, as I was.

HILDEGARDE

Saved?

ROSIE

Saved for a Mr. Flint, "Gussie Flint," as we know him, Madame's star caller. He likes new girls, and will pay for them!

HILDEGARDE *cries out in terror.*

ROSIE

Bull-necked, stout, mean eyes; I thought as I listened; "He'll have no mercy on that new girl, — he had none on me." And after him you'd be anybody's, — whom Madame would receive.

HILDEGARDE

(*Outraged*) But where are the police, that such things can happen?

ROSIE

Yes, — where are they?

HILDEGARDE

Wouldn't it make any difference that a policeman saw me walking with this woman? He looked hard at me, and ought to recognize any description of me.

ROSIE

He could forget it. He knows he'd be broken if he mixed up in the concerns of a house of *this*

class. But it's not him that I hate so much,—it's the higher-ups who grow fat off the blood money of us girls! It's a system that's got its chains on us, and behind the system are the millions and millions of good people who don't know, and don't want to know why or how we live,—and die.

HILDEGARDE

Not a single nice person can have the slightest idea of all this, or he'd be fighting it.

ROSIE

Why most of the men who come here are from very *nice* families,—that way we're far luckier now than later; and all have to be rich. These luxuries you see here,—d'you suppose they're for you and me? They're for the guests who are accustomed to them at home and in their clubs. . . . What *is* that Jurgen doing? Oh, if we should get caught!

HILDEGARDE

But a man from a nice family would help a girl out who'd been *trapped*?

ROSIE

I begged about twenty,—in the first few weeks,—and did I get out? Even if Madame's system

here wasn't too strong for that kind of an escape, every last one of her friends is afraid of publicity, — how he would enjoy having his relatives learn of his coming here, — or his wife, — or perhaps his children? The very last whom I begged to help me — and wasn't he a sympathetic young man! — was a ringer!

HILDEGARDE

A ringer! What's a ringer?

ROSIE

A ringer's a man whom Madame sends up to pose as a caller, but really to find out if you're hoping to get away, and are distressing her friends with your pleading. (*Passing her hand across her forehead*) I don't want to remember what happened after he told Madame, — May God damn his soul! Forgive me, child! I just forgot you were here as I *felt* it again!

HILDEGARDE

(*Running to her and taking her hand*) Oh, poor, poor Rosie! Was it after a ringer that the girl you tried to help get away, took the poison?

ROSIE

No, it was after she'd waited week on week for her friends to find her. Then she slipped the druggist's boy a hundred dollars to steal some cyanide for her, and she divided with me. . . . We planned to take it together, but I lost my nerve and she went alone. Here's the half she gave me, safe in here,— (*fingering her locket*) enough to kill me two or three times over instantly,—it's my greatest treasure!

HILDEGARDE

Do you still plan to use it?

ROSIE

If things get too hard, or when I have to leave.

HILDEGARDE

Have to leave? — Just what that Dolly said.

ROSIE

Madame prides herself on her fresh, attractive girls. Your time comes, and the door opens out for you. Then it's down, and down, and *down*! But I'll take this, and not wait for the county hospital or the river.

HILDEGARDE

(*Broken down*) Suppose we fail tomorrow!

ROSIE

Stop that! Keep cool, and don't let on to Madame or Dolly.

HILDEGARDE

I never was afraid *all through* before!

ROSIE

Stop crying, Honey,—we'll get you out on time. And then when I do pass along, I can feel I've helped at least some one.

HILDEGARDE

(*Taking a resolution*) Miss Rosie, if we can't get out, will you give me half what you've got in your locket?

ROSIE

(*Taken aback*) Are you sure, dear, you want it?

HILDEGARDE

Please, please, if you pity me! And before to-morrow night!

ROSIE

If anything should go wrong, I mightn't be able to get it to you. It would have to be *now*.

HILDEGARDE

Oh, give it to me, Miss Rosie,— give me half!
Won't you *please*?

ROSIE

(After a pause) Yes, I will. *(She opens her locket and divides with* HILDEGARDE *)* Here then, for God knows I wish somebody had given it to me when I stood in your place! *(Steps sound outside, and the bolt is withdrawn)* Hide it quick!

HILDEGARDE *puts it into her jacket pocket.*

ROSIE *slips into the bedroom again, and closes the door tight, just before MADAME opens the main door and comes in. She is carrying a beautiful, sensuously colored kimono, and satin slippers and stockings to match.*

MADAME

(Gives a sharp glance about the room) Been crying? *(Looks at empty tray and smiles)* I'm glad it hasn't spoiled your appetite,— that's always a good sign. *(Lifts the decanter, almost empty)* Why you're quite a little toper, my dear,— who'd have thought it to look at you! And here's something to bring the smiles back. Look at this beauty, and cunning little low slippers to match! I've just been choosing them

from a salesman, or I'd have been up before. Did you ever see anything so lovely and rich looking?

HILDEGARDE

(*Remembering ROSIE's caution not to betray herself*) The colors *are* gorgeous.

MADAME

I'm glad you like them,—they're for you, my dear. Well, take off the coat now and try the kimono on.

HILDEGARDE

(*Retreating and putting her hand in jacket pocket to keep poison safe*) Oh no, thank you.

MADAME

Don't be so coy,—a kimono won't bite!

HILDEGARDE

I don't want any presents of clothes.

MADAME

(*Laughs*) Don't worry, dearie,—you'll pay me for them later. Come, I want to see how my girlie will look.

HILDEGARDE

Thank you; — I like my own clothes best.

MADAME

I'll hang your suit up in my own cedar closet, so it'll be nice when the ransom comes. Please: — take it off, my dear.

HILDEGARDE

I'd rather keep it on.

MADAME

All night? How I would feel, if I thought you were so uncomfortable!

HILDEGARDE

I'm sure I wouldn't be comfortable in *those*, thank you, so please take them back.

MADAME

(*Starts toward bedroom*) I'll just lay them on a chair for you in the other room.

HILDEGARDE

(*Quickly going to her*) Oh, please don't trouble, I *will* keep them since you think it's best.

MADAME

No trouble at all. Besides I want to see that everything — (*Goes into inner room*) I thought so! Dolly's not often on the wrong trail!

(*Leads ROSIE firmly by the arm, back into main room*) Now, Rosie, *why* did you come into this room?

ROSIE

It was early, and there wasn't any work for me, and I thought the new girl might like a little cheering up.

MADAME

Dolly and I can do all the cheering of her she'll need.

HILDEGARDE

(*Trying to help*) Wasn't it kind of Miss Rosie to come?

MADAME

Too kind. . . . By the way, Rosie, how'd you get through a pretty solid door, and leave it still bolted on the *outside*! I'll have to hire you out as a spirit to a clairvoyant!

ROSIE

(*Affecting carelessness*) Oh, someone came along and saw it unbolted and fastened it.

MADAME

I'll inquire. Of course you weren't putting up any game on me?

ROSIE

No, Madame.

MADAME

It's not healthy, you know.

DOLLY *comes in.*

DOLLY

What! Our good, dependable Rosie in here! And our sweet-faced new little girl told me, "I'm all alone!" Dear me, where *will* you end, Kitty, if you start telling lies so soon?

MADAME

(*In a purring voice*) Rosie, a few more little affairs like this, and I really can't keep you! I don't want trouble makers in my house, especially when the bloom, you know, isn't quite what it was. Tell me, what have you been talking about in here?

ROSIE

About the ransom, and how I hadn't any money when I came, and so I couldn't get *my* ransom.

MADAME

H'm'm'm,—that sounds smooth as velvet!

There is an uncertain knock at the door.

MADAME

Please see who's there, Dolly.

DOLLY

(Opening the door part way and peering out)
Lord! Is that you, Kitty!

KITTY

(Her voice heard through the open door) Yes,
I *must* see Madame, Dolly.

DOLLY

She's too busy. Give me your message, Kit.

KITTY

(Despairingly) I've got to see Madame!
She pushes in quickly. KITTY, *though only twenty-five is a total wreck; faded hair and eyes; hollow-faced; emaciated; looks consumptive; a feeble form of a woman, hardly conceivable to have once been unusually fresh and pretty. Her finery hangs loose now on her shrunken figure, looks tawdry and of extremest mode of previous year. She has rouged liberally, trying to look healthy and fresh and young. On the verge of a mental breakdown. Has a bad cough.*

MADAME

(*Staring at her*) How'd you ever get in!

KITTY

I told Peter you'd sent to see me.

MADAME

That was cool!

KITTY

Take me back!

MADAME

You? — here!

KITTY

I'll work for nothing but my board!

MADAME

You couldn't earn it; did you expect us to welcome you back?

KITTY

I was welcome enough for three years till working for you brought me to the hospital and swallowed up my last dollar. Have some pity on what you've done!

MADAME

Pity'd land me in the poorhouse. You'd better run along, Kitty.

KITTY

I'm half starved and awful weak still. Won't you even help me?

MADAME

(*Taking a bill out of her chatelaine bag*) I never was mean,— here's five dollars to give you a lift; — but don't ever come back begging for more!

KITTY

Five dollars! You hand me this *rag* when I've earned hundreds of dollars for you week after week, and was the biggest money getter you ever had!

MADAME

(*Quietly*) Dolly, take her out.

DOLLY

(*Going over to her*) Did you find 'em real attentive when you'd been transferred down to the charity ward? Like their brand of champagne?

KITTY

Laugh away now, curse you! But your turn will come, like me, hustling in the dives and streets, supporting a low-down cur who beats you up when your earnings fall low! Ha! Ha!

Ha! I'll meet *you* some day, Dolly, *on the street!*

DOLLY

Shut up!

KITTY

I'm sorry for you, Rosie, you always were nice, but your looks aren't what they were, so save your money, if you can keep any from these buzzards! (*Waving her arms at MADAME*) If there's any justice, you she-devil, you'll rot in hell along with the men back of you!

MADAM *goes quickly toward her, but KITTY slips by and gets before* HILDEGARDE.

KITTY

(*Shrieking*) You're a new one, are you? Well, just remember *me* while you're enjoying the good things,—it won't be long!

DOLLY *pulls her toward door.*

MADAME

(*In soft voice*) Dolly,—call Peter!

KITTY

(*Suddenly subdued*) Don't, don't call Peter! I'm sorry,—I'll go out quiet.

HILDEGARDE

(Who has looked on speechless runs and gets out her necklace from the cabinet, and rushes to KITTY) Here, take this, poor girl, and sell it, so you won't be hungry!

KITTY reaches out her hand, but MADAME takes hold of HILDEGARDE, restraining her.

MADAME

(Taking necklace from HILDEGARDE) I'll keep this till you need it.

KITTY

Oh-h-h!

DOLLY

(Pulling KITTY along, till she disappears through the door, her hand still outstretched for help) Ugh! Suppose a caller should catch sight of you!

MADAME

(Ignoring HILDEGARDE) Rosie, your room's the best place for you! And I'll ask you once more what you really came in here for!

MADAME and ROSIE go out, and the bolt is shot. HILDEGARDE left alone, covers her face with her hands; then raises it, thinks, takes the poison out of her pocket, puts it in the envelope

from her bag, then listening, hides it far down the crease of a puffy easy chair.

The door opens very softly and JURGEN comes in, with his fingers on his lips, looking about.

JURGEN

Where's Rosie, Miss?

HILDEGARDE

Oh, she was nearly distracted because you didn't come.

JURGEN

Madame sent me out on an errand. It wasn't safe for me to come before; anyway I knew Rosie'd never snitch on me, even if anything should go bad. Where is Rosie?

HILDEGARDE

She's been taken by that woman to her room.

JURGEN

H-u-u-u-h! Madame caught her here! (*With quick suspicion*) Did anybody say anything about *me*?

HILDEGARDE

No. Will she do anything to hurt Miss Rosie?

JURGEN

How do I know? She'll lock her up for a few days sure, anyway.

HILDEGARDE

(*Startled*) Lock Rosie up for a few *days*! Then you'll come up at four o'clock and slip the bolt for me? Oh, you will!

Entreatingly.

JURGEN

(*Astounded*) *Me?* . . . Think I'd touch the job without Rosie managing this end of it up here! — *Nix!*

HILDEGARDE

Oh, don't fail me! I know what kind of place this is now! And I'm sure my father and mother will give you anything you ask,— *anything*.

JURGEN

It's in the afternoon paper what they did to a feller I knew who helped a girl make a getaway. The Government needed him for a witness . . .
Shudders.

HILDEGARDE

What happened?

JURGEN

When the gang got wind of it, one of 'em followed him all the way to the Coast, and — (*Crosses his throat significantly*) And what good did the money he got for helping that girl out do him?

JURGEN *starts for the tea table and begins to gather up.*

HILDEGARDE

Do help me! You'll never regret it!

JURGEN *shrugs his shoulders, and turns his back on her, as he puts things on tray, making a clatter.*

HILDEGARDE *runs to JURGEN, just as MADAME stealthily comes in. HILDEGARDE clutches JURGEN'S arm beseechingly.*

HILDEGARDE

For money you will help me out of this hell?

MADAME

(HILDEGARDE *turns and sees her, as MADAME glides over to her. MADAME boxes HILDEGARDE'S ears*) I'll make it hell for you if you try any games on me! Do you want me to call Peter for you, my dear,— now?

HILDEGARDE

No-o-o!

MADAME

But I will,— if you're not good. (*To JUR-
GEN*) What are you doing?

JURGEN

Come to get the tray, Madame.

MADAME

What was it I heard Kitty saying just now about getting out?

JURGEN

I hate to snitch, but I ought to tell you she was beggin' me to do something which I was informin' her was against your rules.

MADAME

But you — hinted — that *money* came before rules?

JURGEN

I was just tellin' her *no* amount o' money could make me forget the duty I owe you.

MADAME

Noble,— if true.

JURGEN

(*Subserviently, trying to win back favor*) An' that I couldn't be *no* party to help her make a get-away!

MADAME

So it was *that!* (*To HILDEGARDE, in a soft voice*) And now, what have you got to say about all this, dearie?

HILDEGARDE

Nothing.

MADAME

What about the locksmith, Jurgen?

JURGEN

Said he'd be here first thing tomorrow morning.

MADAME

I thought I sent you out to hurry him up! You may go now.

(JURGEN *starts out*. MADAME *calls after him*) Why, don't forget the tray you came for! (*She waits in grim silence for him to take it out*) Now you won't see your kind friend, "Miss Rosie" for *some* while. And there'll be a new lock here *tonight*,— if I know my business;— I'll telephone myself! But don't think this means a

new chance to work somebody. When the locksmith comes, you'll be safe in there (*pointing to the inner room*), with the key turned. And you may talk all you want to through the keyhole, for I'll be right here on the other side to answer you, dearie. . . . I've a feeling that these high spirits of yours won't last through tomorrow!

She goes out and bolts the door.

HILDEGARDE *goes over to the main door and listens; comes back in despair. She gets out the envelope of poison, falls on her knees before the big chair, clasps her hands over her head.*

HILDEGARDE

Oh Father, oh Mother, oh God, I *will* take this in time!

CURTAIN

ACT III

A little before midnight of the following day; a clock on the mantel showing the time. The same room of MADAME'S house. Electric lights lighted, with curious colorings and shadows.

HILDEGARDE *in the richly colored kimono MADAME had brought her the day before, is crouching with her head against the back of a chair. Her hair has been elaborately dressed in the latest mode, and is "way up."*

MADAME, *exquisitely gowned, comes in with a lovely evening dress over her arm. HILDEGARDE jumps as she hears the door open.*

MADAME

Don't start so, girly,—it's only me. Who'd you think it was?

HILDEGARDE

I didn't know. Everyone seems to have the right to come in and out of here except me.

MADAME

Oh, come out of the dumps! (*Opens door. Voluptuous dance music comes from below*) Doesn't that elegant music get into your blood at all? Well, if you behave yourself, you'll be allowed downstairs with the others some day soon. (*Shuts the door; coming close as HILDEGARDE shrinks away*) How pretty Dolly fixed your hair. She's a clever one,—most as good as our professional. Some day you'll have her. And there's the manicure girl besides. Oh, you'll live in fine style here with me.

HILDEGARDE

So Kitty said last night.

MADAME

(*In her soft voice*) You make it hard for me to treat you nicely! But you'll be learning what good manners are before you're much older. In fact you'll begin tonight.

HILDEGARDE

Tonight!

MADAME

Now. There's someone just come in who's crazy to meet you.

HILDEGARDE

(*Retreating, and with hands flung out in protest*) No! No! No! Give me one more day!

MADAME

Why, a little company will do you good, and make you forget how lonesome you've been all today.

HILDEGARDE

For God's sake telegraph my father, and get money for me, since it's money you want *from* me!

MADAME

Who said,—money? I spoke of a caller, and have brought you a beauty of a dress. And by the way, I can't quite make out what Rosie told you here yesterday. But listen to me:—if you think you know more than you do,—just forget it! My friend who's coming expects to find a little girl who understands *nothing*. . . . But you wouldn't make trouble. We'll be good friends yet, my dear. Now go in and put on the dress.

HILDEGARDE

(*Sobbing*) I can't! I can't!

MADAME

(In gentle voice, but raising her hand as if to strike her again) I don't want to give you something that *will* make you cry! Now have this dress on before we come back. Take it in there, and do please have a smile on your face when you come out, my dear.

She forces the dress on HILDEGARDE, pushes her in, and shuts the door. MADAME starts toward main door, when there comes a knock, followed without waiting by "FLINT," entering in evening dress. He's stout, bull-necked, overfed, mean-eyed, a certain type of nouveau riche.

MADAME

Oh, Mr. Flint, I was just coming to get you.

FLINT

Thought I'd drift up,— can find my way round here pretty well,— eh, old girl?

MADAME

(Laughs subserviently) You've such an unusual sense of humor, Mr. Flint.

FLINT

Want to hear a secret? — I wasn't born with my humor,—it's an accomplishment! (*Looks about the room*) You're certainly a clever one for keeping the tone up. Room all redecorated I see . . . that's the way to make it pay.

MADAME

I call that a real compliment, Mr. Gussie.

FLINT

One almost feels as if it was his own place.

MADAME

That's what makes all you gentlemen want to come again.

FLINT

Yes, that and the kind of girls you have, always young and healthy, and refined looking and speaking. Where is she?

MADAME

Prinking. She'll be ready in a moment.

FLINT

You said she was young?

MADAME

Wait till you see her!

FLINT

And uncommonly pretty?

MADAME

Dainty's a rosebud,— the minute I laid eyes on her I thought,—“ There's a girl to satisfy even our Mr. Gussie.” It was one of those lucky chances,— meeting her,— that you can't help taking!

FLINT

And she walked right along with you, you said, *innocent* as anybody could want!

MADAME

(*Laughs*) And holding her umbrella *so* carefully all the time over my head!

FLINT

You're a wonder!

MADAME

That sum I spoke of over the phone yesterday was all right?

FLINT

Seven hundred's a trifle steep,— for an old acquaintance.

MADAME

Remember what a quiet house you're in.

FLINT

I'm not likely to forget,— when I help pay for the quiet.

MADAME

Well, if you had to pay the wages of all the men I have to keep here, and double rent, and double everything, you'd know it took a good head to keep in front of the game.

FLINT

Not to mention the cost of maintaining a highly protected industry!

MADAME

(*Grimaces*) The collector was around this afternoon,— they've raised on me again! It's cost a fortune these twenty years to be able to guarantee no interference with my concerns, or publicity to my guests.

FLINT

What do you care? — The fortune hasn't come out of *your* pocket.

MADAME

Oh, I know the men who come here aren't afraid of spending.

FLINT

Well, I won't be, if she's all you said she was.

MADAME

You'll think you never saw such a peach.

FLINT

With the bloom all on yet,— eh?

MADAME

She's the most bewitching little innocent you ever saw. She knows pretty nearly nothing,— doesn't imagine what she was brought here for!

FLINT

My style! Telephone me again whenever you get one like that!

MADAME *opens door into bedroom and goes in.*

MADAME

I thought I told you to put that dress on!

FLINT

(Soothingly) Oh, never mind the dress!

HILDEGARDE *comes rushing in in kimono, throwing off MADAME'S grip, determined to get the poison. FLINT is in the chair in which it is concealed. HILDEGARDE stops, baffled,*

then suddenly resolving, throws herself before him on her knees.

HILDEGARDE

Have mercy! Have mercy! Help me! Help me out of here! She stole me! She said it was for ransom, but I know now for what loathsome, degrading things!

MADAME

You don't know what you're talking about!

HILDEGARDE

(*Ignoring her*) No, no, you can't be so low and vile! .

FLINT

(*Sneering*) What? So *this* is the peach bloom all on? She doesn't know anything?

HILDEGARDE

If you have a sister, a mother, you can't, oh you won't, touch me!

MADAME

Be quiet!

HILDEGARDE

For your mother's sake say you'll help me!

FLINT

Damn your impudence,—I won't stand any more of that kind of talk! What you need's a good breaking in!

HILDEGARDE

If you try to touch me, I'll kill myself, and you'll have to answer for my death. I'll find a way before you can get out of the room, you coward.

FLINT

(*Sneering to MADAME*) Things like this won't improve your business!

MADAME

(*White with anger, and jerking HILDEGARDE to her feet*) I never expected this, but I know *who* we have to reckon with!

FLINT

Ugh! She disgusts me! (*Waving HILDEGARDE away*) I simply don't want to see her again.

MADAME

(*To HILDEGARDE*) Go into that room,—and wait for me.

She pushes HILDEGARDE in and shuts the door.

FLINT

(*Furious*) I don't suppose she really meant that suicide talk,— but I'm not taking any chances of getting mixed up in a thing of that kind.

MADAME

She's got nothing to kill herself with,— she was just scared. And I swear I didn't think she'd caught on to anything,—

FLINT

One more such entertainment as I've had to-night would mean goodbye from me! That suicide talk and — (*Mimicking* HILDEGARDE)
“If you have a sister, a mother!”

Starts to go.

MADAME

Oh, Mr. Flint, you won't go like this! We've always pleased you before. Why not see Dolly?

FLINT

No; I'll go to the Baths instead.

MADAME

Do stay and see Dolly! You're such good friends. She'll make you forget this ungrateful girl's whining.

FLINT

H'm'm'm, a ride with Dolly mightn't be so rotten. Drove my car over myself.

MADAME

(*Rings bell*) Splendid. Dolly loves to ride.

FLINT

All right,— I'll take her.

JURGEN *knocks on door, and comes in.*

MADAME

Tell Miss Dolly to come here right away.

JURGEN *goes out.*

FLINT

(*Vindictively*) Why don't you bring Mr. Jones up here? Her yarns (*nodding toward inner room*) wouldn't bother *him*, you know.

MADAME

I'm not keen for it, but — (*with tightened lips*) it might be the best way to bring her to terms. And when she's tamed down she'll be a great money getter! She's got those womanly looks the men care more about than any other kind. By the way, your friend's able to pay what we agreed on for you?

FLINT

He's able enough. A tip now for past services. He's well worth catching for a regular guest, though he hasn't been around in the past.

MADAME

What? Not been round at all?

FLINT

No: so I'm initiating him as a good fellow to-night. It'll be a great joke to tell on him,—to the men.

MADAME

(*Laughs*) Your sense of humor is a lively one,—and no mistake.

FLINT

My humor gives you a good business chance if you're clever.

DOLLY *comes in in a rich evening gown.*

FLINT

Hel-lo Doll! Feel like a good long ride to-night?

DOLLY

No thanks, Gussie, not in the rain.

FLINT

The storm's over, and the moon's out,— it'll be great.

MADAME

Do go, Dolly,— it'll be lovely,— light on the river and all that —

DOLLY

Got your chauffeur waiting?

FLINT

Driving myself,— can let the speed out that way, my girl.

DOLLY

I know, but I'm a bit leery of speeding, Gussie. You know last time I said never again without your chauffeur. *He* never goes over sixty!

FLINT

(*Exasperated*) Very well, if you can't trust me. . . . It won't be *my* loss.

Starts to go.

MADAME

(*Quickly and low to DOLLY*) Make up to him! (*Nodding toward other room*) *She's* made him mad! (*Aloud*) Dolly, think how pleasant 'twill be,— real romantic!

DOLLY *runs over and catches FLINT's arm as he is going out.*

DOLLY

(*Coaxingly*) I'll go anywhere you like, dear old Gussie!

FLINT

(*Still sulky*) Don't know if I care about it now.

DOLLY

Yes, you do too! (*Gives him a kiss*) Wait a jiff till I get my things.

Runs out.

FLINT

(*Stirred by the kiss,—calling after her*) I'll help you on with your cloak,—and better take your furs!

He follows her out.

MADAME *rings the bell, which JURGEN answers immediately.*

MADAME

You or Francis assist the gentleman who's resting in the dining-room up here.

JURGEN *goes out.*

MADAME *with firm tread crosses to HILDEGARDE'S door and opens it.*

MADAME

Put on that dress this minute, and if you should ever feel like making another scene, take *this* to remember.

MADAME *goes in.* *There is a piercing scream from* HILDEGARDE.

There comes a knock; MADAME hastens out, shutting inner door, as FLINT *returns.*

FLINT

Say, but we've hatched up a ripping plan! Dolly 'nd I're going to motor down the coast for a few days; I don't know just where, but wherever it is, 'twon't be any Quaker meeting!

MADAME

I'm more than anxious to oblige you, Mr. Flint, but really I need Dolly especially,—this new girl's a kind of hard proposition for me to manage without her.

FLINT

Dolly's crazy to go now, and of course I'll make it worth your while all right; but if you aren't willing —

MADAME

(*Pacifyingly, as she sees him turning sulky again*) Very well. And you're making it worth

Mistress Dolly's while too, I warrant, if she has turned so eager. 'Twon't be many years before she's able to start a tidy little establishment of her own.

FLINT

She's such good company and enjoys things so, — you don't mind it if she *is* a smart business woman.

MADAME

I won't stand in her way when the time comes, though of course the less competition,—

DOLLY comes in, with a suitcase pasted with hotel posters. Has handsome furs and motoring clothes; looks elated.

DOLLY

Approve of our daisy little spree? Babes at the seashore stunt!

MADAME

You were right to please Mr. Flint, and I can trust you both absolutely.

DOLLY

Sure you can,—he brought me back alive last time, didn't he? And he's promised to make it a whole week again! My! won't the girls be green tomorrow when they hear!

MADAME

I'll tell them it's a reward for being good. You've been a comfort to me, Dolly, ever since you came to me.

ERIC comes in, in evening dress and overcoat; hat a little on one side; he is intoxicated, bewildered, unsteady. FRANCIS, a footman in livery, is supporting him. He takes off ERIC'S hat and coat and lays them on the sofa.

MADAME

Here, Francis, take this suitcase and put it in Mr. Flint's motor.

DOLLY

And there's another grip just inside my door.
FRANCIS goes out.

ERIC sinks into a chair, and looks about dizzily.

FLINT

Now, Jones,—

ERIC

(In thick, unrecognizable voice) Jonesh? —
Oh, yesh,— Jonesh here, I 'member,— ha! ha!

FLINT

We two are going out of town for a little vacation for a week or so, Dolly and I. Look you up when I get back.

ERIC

A'right.

FLINT

You'll be taken care of here in good shape, as comfortable as your club.

ERIC

I c-can look after myself; an' tha' dinner of yoursh wash *not* t-too much for me, L-lippley, my boy.

FLINT

(*Sharply*) You've got my name wrong,—it's Flint.

MADAME

We never think of taking advantage of little things we may overhear about our callers, Mr. *Flint*.

ERIC

(*Gazing at him*) Wonderfu' man to shtart out l-like thish, L-lippley,—*F-flint*,—when you g-got 'way with moren' any two of the resht of ush.

FLINT

(*To DOLLY, taking her by the arm*) Hurry, we've got to run around for my stuff before we can start, you know. — (*To ERIC*) Good luck, old man.

DOLLY

Ta! Ta! Mr. Jones. Goodbye, Madame. And don't be *too* soft on our new Kitty!

MADAME

Trust me! Au revoir! You and Dolly have a lovely trip, Mr. Gussie. But take good care of my girl!

FLINT and DOLLY *go out gaily laughing.*

ERIC

F-flint, eh? Tha' man's name *used* to be Lipp-ley. D'you s'posesh his father knows it's F-flint now?

MADAME

(*Laughs*) No, I suppose he doesn't.

ERIC

Wh-wha'd you think! I've never b-been in a p-place of thish ch-character before,—k-kind of funny for a man of thirty,—d-don't you think so yourself?

The thought seems almost to sober him for the moment.

MADAME

It is a bit unusual.

ERIC

(*Suspiciously*) Thish not 'nother new g-girl like Lippleysh one? Never w-would do that low-down mean t-trick!

MADAME

Oh no, indeed, Mr. Jones, but she's our prettiest,—not quite twenty yet; and sometimes the little witch does like to pretend it's her first experience; some men like that, but I hope she won't bother you with it! Don't pay any attention if she tries that story on you! Or any other! . . . She *must* be ready now (*She turns off the main lights, leaving only the lights on the table, soft and curiously colored shades. Room in scarcely half light. MADAME opens the door of bedroom, and goes in. Her voice is heard within*) Come on, dearie! . . . What! . . . Still some spirit left? . . . There's simply no use resisting. . . . I'll hook it,—and here's your jewelry. (MADAME *returns, firmly holding HILDEGARDE by the wrist. As she lets go, the wrist shows white, and*

then red from the grip with which MADAME has held it. HILDEGARDE is in the evening gown, lovely, but very low cut and clinging to her; she has her pearl necklace on. HILDEGARDE cannot raise her eyes from the floor for shame) Mr. Jones, this is our Kitty. Now if you want anything, please ring. There are always men servants at hand. I'll send you up some extra choice champagne, and you two can get acquainted over it.

ERIC

Had all I want, b-but send it up for K-kitty,—if she likesh it.

MADAME

Kitty dear,—remember!

Gives her a meaning look, then, after a careful scrutiny of ERIC, she purses her lips as if to say "Drunk!" goes out, and turns the new key in main door on them.

ERIC

Aren't you c-coming over to t-talk to me, li'l d-darling?

HILDEGARDE

(Making her last appeal, but too much ashamed to look up) Mr. Jones, I was stolen by that

wicked woman, and am a prisoner here. Help me to go *home!*

ERIC

Funny,—jusht wha' she t-tol' me you'd say. C-come give me *one* kiss!

HILDEGARDE

This is true, help me out, or I'll kill myself right now!

She takes her resolution, and goes past him quickly to the large chair. Gets envelope of poison out. ERIC has risen uncertainly from his chair as she passes him, and holds out his arms to clasp her. But she eludes him.

ERIC

You remin' me of shomebody,—c-can't think now who 'tis,—an' your v-voice t-too.

HILDEGARDE *opens the envelope, and takes the poison out. She has the table between her and ERIC.*

HILDEGARDE

(Firmly and without looking at ERIC)
Listen to me! You and the men like you who come here are *murderers!* But I won't wait for a slow death, and if my father and mother ever know, they'll be glad I didn't wait —

ERIC

Shtop! Shtop! Theresh some mishtake!

HILDEGARDE

What else can I do? (*She lifts the poison to her lips, and raises her eyes defiantly to look at the man*) Eric! You! You!

Sinks into a chair, and covers her face with her hands.

ERIC

Itsh not *Hildegarde*?

HILDEGARDE

Yes, it's Hildegarde.

ERIC

(*Coming unsteadily over*) Hil'egarde, my li'l one,—wha'sh this? (*Gently takes the cyanide out of her hand, looks at it*) Not p-poison?

HILDEGARDE

Yes, I couldn't see any other way out.

ERIC

(*Gradually sobering up through shock, but still badly confused*) I mus' think. I thought you were at your b-birthday party t-tonight.

HILDEGARDE

I was stolen yesterday, and kept here for a terrible Mr. Flint.

ERIC

(*Beside himself*) F-flint,— oh, my God!

HILDEGARDE

I begged him on my knees to help me, and all he did was to curse me and turn away in disgust.

ERIC

Thank God! Thank God for that! I d-didn't know you were missing. I g-got back t-to the city late tonight, an' w-went out to the end of a d-dinner. They must have kep' thish out of the p-papers.

HILDEGARDE

Take me home now!

ERIC

I mus' think,— I mus' think how.

HILDEGARDE

Why just tell her who you and I are.

ERIC

I'd never g-get you out that way.

HILDEGARDE

What!

ERIC

(*Walks unsteadily to door, and tries it*) D-did that woman lock us in?

HILDEGARDE

Yes, and there's no other way out,—I'm in prison.

ERIC

(*Desperately*) If my head were only c-clear!
. . . Running water in there?
Nods toward inner room.

HILDEGARDE

Yes.

ERIC

Then s'cuse me,—I'll dowse my head clear.
(*Goes out for a moment, to return with clear eyes, and gradually pulls himself together*) Now for our plans;—you're right — (*Examining windows*) Everything secured fast. You'd better sit there in case we're interrupted.

Pointing to chair across table.

HILDEGARDE

Why can't you tell her who I am and take me out?

ERIC

I'm a total stranger to her, and the man who introduced me has gone on a spree,—no reaching him. And then I came here,—not myself—as you know.

HILDEGARDE

If I hadn't looked up in time!

ERIC

Don't! Don't! Little girl!

HILDEGARDE

But if you promised a great big ransom?

ERIC

No; if I started on that line, she'd take you from me at once. It's not only losing you, but publicity; there's *nothing* she'd be afraid to do to avoid that, and she'd be shielded. . . . The police!

HILDEGARDE

Oh, a girl has told me!

ERIC

Yes, if I tried them, they'd first deny there was such a place as this one. By the time I could get back and in here with a search party, a rumor would have reached this woman,— and you'd be gone,— who *knows where?* And against the word of one man who came here drunk, there'd be half a dozen witnesses to swear there'd never been such a girl here at all!

HILDEGARDE

(*In terror*) Don't leave me!

ERIC

I wouldn't dare go out of this room for a minute without you!

A knock at the door, and the key is turned.

ERIC

Take care! Pretend you never saw me before!

MADAME *comes in, followed by FRANCIS with a small table, and JURGEN with a tray and champagne.*

MADAME

Set the table there, closer,— Francis, and put the lights over on it.

FRANCIS *arranges things comfortably, draws the chairs up, and HILDEGARDE and ERIC sit opposite. FRANCIS goes out.*

MADAME

Getting on all snug and cosy, Mr. Jones?

ERIC

Yesh . . . didn' t-take *ush* long to g-get 'cquainted. (*To HILDEGARDE*) Have a glash with me, Kitty! (*To JURGEN*) Push th' young lady'sh chair closer.

MADAME

That's enough, Jurgen.

JURGEN *goes out.*

MADAME

(*To HILDEGARDE, who is huddled in her chair*)
Thaw out, my dear,—it's a spring night!

ERIC *pretends to make love across the table.*

MADAME, *satisfied, starts to go.*

MADAME

Well, Kitty's certainly a sweet little one, isn't she, Mr. Jones?

ERIC

You're all jush lofely angels!

MADAME *goes out and locks the door.*

ERIC

Ugh-h! — Poor little girl,— forgive me!

HILDEGARDE

Oh, how can we get out? There's an awful man named Peter at the door, and I don't know how many others.

ERIC

Here's our one chance. (*Draws out his revolver*) Lucky for us I was going down to the docks right after the dinner, and see how things had been getting on. Then I — forgot all about going. . . . We've got to figure out a way of making this good. (*Counting up on his fingers*) Doorman, one; two footmen here, three; I've an impression of at least one other; that makes four besides Madame, and whomever else she can call on. And most surely there are firearms in this house ready for just such an emergency.

HILDEGARDE

What chance have we against such odds?

ERIC

Only *one* chance; to take them by surprise and each of us to keep our nerve.

HILDEGARDE

I'll try to.

ERIC

We've got to get this door open, and if possible reduce their number by one. Let's see how this plan would work; I'll ring for the footman, then sit here at the table, and you stand with the revolver against the wall there. (*Points to left of door*) When the man comes, cover him from the first second he gets in. I'll call to him, so he'll look my way and not see you. . When he's well into the room slip over, close the door, and say, "Hands up!" Then we'll go out together, — when the real struggle will come!

HILDEGARDE

And then you'll take the revolver?

ERIC

No, it's as powerful with you as with me. You're a fine shot, and I know you'll keep cool. Without the revolver you'd be helpless, and my strength *must* be made to count for us. Now go

in, dear, and get your own things on,—quick please.

HILDEGARDE

They took them away from me this morning.

ERIC

Devils! Never mind, slip on my coat, dear. (*Takes it from sofa and holds it for her*) And the little necklace. . . . (*His voice breaks, then he looks her in the eyes*) Hilda, let no one get near you, or you might lose the revolver. Keep close to me, covering our rear. How many flights,—I forget?

HILDEGARDE

Two,—and we're at the back.

ERIC

If we get safely to the outside door, hand me the revolver, and you go out first. (*Giving her money*) Here's half; if I'm stopped, don't wait a second, but fly to Cousin Laura's,—know the way?

HILDEGARDE *nods*.

ERIC

On no account a cab, and don't stop anywhere! Take a street car if one comes along, and hurry!

HILDEGARDE

Yes!

ERIC

Don't shoot unless you must, but if you have to,— shoot straight! And be *sure* to save the last shot . . . to use if you don't get past the door,— for yourself!

HILDEGARDE

Yes, yes, I won't be afraid to do that!

ERIC

(*Handing her back the poison, which she puts into the overcoat pocket*) Here's the poison,— if anything happens to the revolver.

HILDEGARDE

They won't take *me* alive again. But you, Eric?

ERIC

If you must use it, I'll be already past bothering about, darling child,— just one of the men who disappear. (*He tests the chairs, and wrenches a good club out of the leg of one*) This'll do finely . . . ready?

HILDEGARDE

(*Taking station at door*) Yes, Eric.

ERIC

Then here goes!

Rings the bell, gets into chair, with club hidden across his knees, raises glass in left hand and assumes expression of drunken disgust.

The key is turned, and MADAME stands in the doorway.

MADAME

Anything wrong, Mr. Jones? The footman's waiting in the room across, and may be delayed a moment.

ERIC

Noshinks wrong 'cept your champagne,—it's fiercesh!

Holds glass shakingly out toward her.

MADAME

(Suspiciously, and not coming in) Where's Kitty? . . . I thought I heard a crashing noise.

ERIC

K-kittysh — K-ittysh a'right. *(Waves glass toward inner room)* Fixshin' her hair. But this ish *not* my bran'! C-come t-tashte cheap shtuff yourself!

MADAME

(*Displeased and coming in*) Why, Mr. Jones, we serve nothing but the highest priced on the mark — *what's* happened to that chair!

HILDEGARDE *steals noiselessly across on the heavy rug, and closes the door.* MADAME *turns quickly at the sound.* HILDEGARDE *covers her with the revolver.*

HILDEGARDE

Hands up!

MADAME

(*Glaring into the revolver*) Oh, so this is —?

HILDEGARDE

Not a sound, or I'll shoot. Eric?

ERIC

Quick now!

He goes over, and opens door, and goes out, partly followed by HILDEGARDE, who keeps the revolver pointed at MADAME. A door is heard to open across the hall and one hears the sound of laughter and clinking glasses. ERIC pushes HILDEGARDE in again, and closes the door.

ERIC

Narrow escape!

A breathless silence for a minute, as the three stand motionless. Then ERIC cautiously opens the door again. All seems quiet.

ERIC

Now!

ERIC, followed by HILDEGARDE, who keeps MADAME covered to the last second, goes out, HILDEGARDE speaking as the door closes.

HILDEGARDE

The key's in,—turn it!

MADAME, the moment the door is closed, springs to the wall and rings furiously. Rushes to door, pounds, and calls.

MADAME

Jurgen! Quick! Let me out!

JURGEN

(Outside, and shaking the door) Where's the key?

MADAME

Catch them,—Kitty's getting off!

JURGEN

(*Calling*) Francis! Peter! Giovanni!
There's a getaway!

MADAME

Do for the man, nab the girl! The drunk's
stealing Kitty for *himself*!

There are two almost simultaneous shots.

*The steps are heard of someone running up-
stairs.*

JURGEN

(*Outside*) Madame?

MADAME

(*Remembering the quiet of her house, she
whispers sharply through the keyhole*) I must
see to things.

JURGEN

The key's gone . . . and Peter's wounded.

MADAME

(*Furious*) But the girl and the drunk?

JURGEN

Peter landed one shot in him.

MADAME

You fool! — Have you got 'em both?

JURGEN

Naw, they both made a getaway!

CURTAIN

ACT IV

A month later, mid-afternoon in May.

A spacious, charming living-room in the MORRIS' home at Clarendon, a small college town. Opposite at the left a broad open doorway gives a view of the main hall and stairway from the first turn, where there is a window. Opposite at the right, French windows open on a loggia and a lovely garden in the colors of spring. Beyond there is a glimpse of college towers and a low range of blue hills in the distance. On the right side of the room a door leads into the Professor's study.

One hears the outside door opened. PROFESSOR MILES MORRIS hurries into the hall, carrying a newspaper. He is a tall man of forty-six, with a sensitive, intellectual face. He looks quickly into the living-room, goes out, and calls up the stairway.

MILES

Jinny, Jinny, I want you!

Goes into the living-room and walks up and down.

HILDEGARDE *comes into sight down the hall, wearing a dainty spring house dress. Her hair is up.*

MILES

(*Before seeing who it is*) Jinny, for heaven's sake, what do you think has happened?

HILDEGARDE

(*Flies to him*) Daddy, dear, what *has* happened?

MILES

Oh, it's you, Honey; why — er — nothing's the matter.

HILDEGARDE

(*Leaning over*) Oh — in the paper? (*A thought suddenly comes to her; she asks anxiously*) It's nothing bad about Rosie?

MILES

(*Putting the paper away in his pocket*) That girl Rosie? No, why should there be? She's — er — she's doing finely.

HILDEGARDE

I keep thinking about her, and of how beautifully you carried out your promise to me, dearest Father, and had her rescued from that terrible

place. Though it makes me shudder to think how that rescue society when they *did* break in, almost failed to find Rosie! (*She wipes his face off carefully with her handkerchief, and kisses him*) How you've hurried.

MILES

I want to see your mother right away!

HILDEGARDE

(*Turning to go*) I'll find her.

MILES

And alone, please, Hildegarde.

HILDEGARDE

(*At the door making a little face at him, and laughing*) And *nothing's* happened,—eh, Mr. Papa?

She goes out and is seen running lightly up the stairs.

MILES *sits, takes the newspaper out of his pocket, and studies it eagerly and with concern.*

MRS. MORRIS *is seen hurrying down the stairs. She comes in hastily.*

MRS. MORRIS

Miles, dear,— what is it? Hildegarde says “ nothing’s happened, but poor Daddy’s all upset ”!

MILES

Jinny,— see this,— it’s all out in the papers!
Gives her the newspaper.

MRS. MORRIS

(Breathless) What — what’s all out?

MILES

Look there,— yesterday Rosie told on the witness stand all about Hildegarde’s capture, imprisonment and escape!

MRS. MORRIS

(Reading) Not *all*? Not her *name*?
Sinking down in chair, and hurriedly reading over the front page.

MILES

No, Rosie testified that none of them had learned it.

MRS. MORRIS

Thank God for that! I’ve lived in terror ever since the trial of that creature, that Madame, be-

gan. (*She has been looking through the paper. Says jubilantly*) But, Miles, there isn't a *single* clue to who the girl is!

MILES

If there had been, the newspapers would be tracking Hildegarde down now, and publishing her name to the world.

MRS. MORRIS

Put the paper with the others, dear, where Hilda can't see it. We must do everything to make her forget.

MILES *puts paper in drawer, locks it, and puts the key in his pocket.*

MRS. MORRIS

It's enough for her to know that Rosie is out, and being cared for by us,—she mustn't learn about this trial,—or that her story has become known.

MILES

If they should learn her name, they'd bring out the whole story,—to the last detail—and think how it would be twisted!

MRS. MORRIS

It would blight Hildegarde's life! Oh, I can *never* forgive myself for not having told her in time to save her from her frightful experience. And as I think it over, it was only one of *fifty* things that might have happened to her through the ignorance I kept her in.

MILES

If we only had other children, we'd not fail again. But don't worry: this story won't get out now, Beloved Wife,—think how few know it: only Walter and Laura Prescott, and we three here. For that unknown man who pitied her and helped her out will never betray her.

MRS. MORRIS

He had some good in him, depraved though he was. . . . And not even Eric knows!—I'm thankful.

MILES

Why do you suppose Hilda has changed toward Eric so?

MRS. MORRIS

It *is* strange,—she never speaks of him, does she?

MILES

And you caught the rascal at Laura's only a month ago trying to make love to her! Do you suppose our little girl fears he has learned her story?

MRS. MORRIS

No, I've told her how Laura promised *never* to tell him.

The doorbell rings.

MILES

We certainly are wonderfully fortunate, not to have had this secret escape.

EVA, *a trim maid, comes in with cards on a salver.*

EVA

A lady asking for you, Ma'am, and the Professor and Miss Hildegarde.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Looking at cards*) Show her in,— but never mind about speaking to Miss Hildegarde.

EVA *goes out.*

MRS. MORRIS

Martha Oakes! What can *she* have come way up from the city for? It makes me uneasy.

MRS. MORRIS *goes to the door to greet MRS. OAKES, who comes in, in traveling clothes.*

MRS. MORRIS

Martha, dear! What a delightful surprise!
Your first visit!

All three greet each other warmly.

MRS. OAKES

I'm awfully sorry to say, Jinny, that it's a legal matter I've come up here for, and to get your help about,—a case which Laura's husband put into the hands of our society,—the "Rosie Case." You see we decided after rescuing the girl and hearing her story that her case was so clear a one of white slavery that no jury *could* refuse conviction of this infamous Madame,—even under our lenient state laws.

MRS. MORRIS

(Controlling herself, and speaking with polite interest) And — now?

MRS. OAKES

We're having the fight of our lives! The Madame has amassed over three hundred thousand from the earnings of a long succession of

girls, which explains the brilliant lawyer who's defending her; but does *not* explain all the tricks and difficulties which have arisen from the very start. Powerful men from far in the background are protecting this keeper!

MILES

Hideous!

MRS. OAKES

The case is going to pieces, and we must have new testimony, or there'll be either a disagreement of the jury or acquittal:—but this morning I got a clue which I hope will save the whole case!

MILES

A clue,—I congratulate you!

MRS. OAKES

You must have read in the morning's paper how this Rosie told a thrilling story of *another* girl who had escaped?

MILES

(*Flustered*) Why,—er — yes, I did glance at it.

MRS. OAKES

Early today a servant came to me, a footman named Jurgen,—whom the Madame had turned out of her house, accusing him of aiding this girl to escape! He's after revenge. And in the hope it will help to convict the Madame, he has given me the name of the girl's father.

MILES

His motives would kill the story.

MRS. OAKES

No, he told me the truth; oh, you don't know how badly I feel to tell you that I *know* that the other girl who escaped was — Hildegarde!

MRS. MORRIS

Hildegarde!

MILES

(*At the same time*) Impossible!

MRS. OAKES

Unfortunately I know the whole story.

MRS. MORRIS

No! No! No!

MRS. OAKES

Yes, Jinny, dear, I've got all the facts, how one dark, rainy Friday afternoon,— the very day I saw you at Laura's — the unsuspecting child was seized at the Madame's door, carried to an apartment, and locked in.

MILES

And you really credit this fabrication of a discharged servant from a place like that!

MRS. OAKES

Please! Shall I tell you more? How Hildegard promised a ransom,— fifteen hundred dollars, and gave Jurgen her father's name and address,— *your* name, Professor Morris, and *I* knew the address, which had slipped his memory.

MILES

(*Wildly*) He might have got hold of my *name*,— I've written some books!

MRS. OAKES

Yes, Jurgen looks like a man who reads treatises on Greek Art! . . . The case is simply beyond doubt.

MILES

Beyond doubt it's absurd!

MRS. OAKES

I have many other facts, if you must have them. How she was rescued unharmed the next day at midnight, by an unknown man. And then Jurgen gave me an excellent description of the girl; — she wore a lovely pearl necklace, and —

MRS. MORRIS

(*Tearfully giving in*) You haven't told this story to *anyone*, Martha?

MRS. OAKES

No, Jinny.

MILES

Suppose this story were true,—why did you come here today?

MRS. OAKES

We must have a witness to prove that Madame is an actual white slaver —

MRS. MORRIS

You can't mean that you want to —?

MRS. OAKES

Yes, I've come to ask Hildegarde to go back with me, and to testify tomorrow morning.

MRS. MORRIS

Put *Hildegarde* on the witness stand!

MRS. OAKES

(*Strongly moved*) Look how the matter stands today. Public interest is centered on this trial, and public opinion is waiting to be formed. If the case fails, all the slavers will receive direct encouragement to go on, and even honest people will say, "That Rosie was just after blackmail,—such things don't happen!" To lose now on such a clear typical case of white slavery, means to cripple the cause in this state for years to come. But with Hildegarde's striking testimony, this Madame would be sentenced. And more than that, public opinion would be so fired that it might force through our bill in this legislature. And *then* we'd have a penalty that would deter,—ten to thirty years behind the bars.

MILES

Hildegarde *shall not* go and ruin her life!

MRS. OAKES

But think how few girls we can ask to testify,—how few like Hildegarde come out unscathed!

MILES

(*Heatedly*) Unscathed? Then you don't know the full story: how she knew almost nothing, and learned everything there, how she was reserved for a brute, who turned away disgusted when he found she was no longer ignorant, how she tried to escape, and was betrayed, her clothes dragged from her, and garbed in a most offensive dress, was struck and threatened, and then by mere chance was rescued by the next man, a *drunken* fellow, sobered by her story, just as our precious child was trying to end her life with cyanide. And it's *that* story you want her to rehearse so it will be on everybody's tongue!

MRS. OAKES

But remember her escape *in time* is one case in a thousand! You were marvellously fortunate, Jinny, marvellously. That very dress would bring the matter home to the jury.

MRS. MORRIS

That dress went into the Prescotts' furnace!

MILES

Have you got a daughter, Mrs. Oakes?

MRS. OAKES

No,— but —

MILES

If you had, you'd fight as we will to keep her young life from getting into the mire,— again!

MRS. OAKES

If I could help these girls more than now in this warfare by laying down my own life, I'd do it gladly.

MRS. MORRIS

I'm sure you would, Martha. . . . And I'd give up *my* life for my daughter!

MRS. OAKES

Won't you even let me see Hildegarde, to put the case before her?

MRS. MORRIS

Why, Martha, how could we? When we're doing our best to help her forget it all! And it wouldn't do any good,— she would never do what her parents didn't wish her to.

MRS. OAKES

(*Defeated. Rising*) And you'd rather see this she-wolf freed, and no new law come,— you'd

rather see these pitiless men and women — these fiends — flourish —

HILDEGARDE *appears, coming up the garden path; she is wearing a pretty garden hat, carrying a basket of dainty spring flowers.*

MRS. MORRIS

We do sympathize with you and anything else —

HILDEGARDE *comes to the French windows.*

MRS. OAKES

— and see them consume other girls like Hildegard and Rosie!

HILDEGARDE

(*Coming in*) Why, Mother, are you getting news from Rosie?

MRS. OAKES

(*Quickly*) Your daughter Hildegard?

HILDEGARDE

Yes,— I'm Hildegard.

MRS. OAKES

I'm Martha Oakes. . . . I'm so glad to see you, my dear.

HILDEGARDE

Tell me about Rosie, Mrs. Oakes, tell me everything!

MRS. MORRIS

Hilda, dear,—please! Mrs. Oakes is discussing a matter of business just with your father and me.

HILDEGARDE *turns obediently to go.*

MRS. OAKES

But, Hildegard, I want *your* advice too, and Rosie needs your help!

HILDEGARDE

Rosie? Help? I thought she was doing finely, Father!

MILES

(*Pointedly*) If we need you, dear, we'll let you know.

HILDEGARDE

(*Remaining, and sitting down*) Father! . . . And now, Mrs. Oakes? Tell me,—*everything!*

MRS. OAKES

The woman who kept Rosie in slavery has been arrested, and is on trial!

HILDEGARDE

Oh-h-h! That woman on trial! Mother,—
did you know about it?

MRS. MORRIS

(*Reluctantly*) Yes, but we didn't want you to
get wrought up.

MRS. OAKES

Now we fear she will get off scot free!

HILDEGARDE

How can she go free, when they've caught her!

MRS. OAKES

All our witnesses except Rosie have been
bought or terrified into silence, and poor Rosie
is breaking down. We must prove this woman
has held girls against their will for such a life,
or she'll get off and begin the same business over
again!

HILDEGARDE

(*Springing to her feet*) She shan't begin
again. *I'll* be your witness!

MRS. MORRIS

You're excited,—don't say such a thing, dar-
ling!

MRS. OAKES

Splendid! You can accomplish more good in this cause than any other young girl I've ever known.

MILES

Hildegarde, you shan't think of it!

MRS. MORRIS

Daughter, you haven't any idea of what it is you're asking,—something no loving parents could ever permit!

MILES

Hilda, dearest, you simply can't realize what it means to go before a courtroom crowded mostly with curious men, and be questioned and cross-questioned on such unspeakable things, to have your name and face and story spread wide in every newspaper. See this! (*He unlocks drawer, and gets out paper*). Look at today's paper; headlines half across the sheet, and three pictures of that unfortunate girl Rosie,—one sobbing on the witness stand,—broken down under cross examination!

HILDEGARDE

(*After looking at it*) Awful! — Poor Rosie!

MRS. OAKES

The other witnesses are swearing that Rosie came there voluntarily! You are all we have, Hildegarde, between us and defeat. .

MILES

Darling, there'd be false witnesses to swear that you too came there *voluntarily*! And that lawyer would do his worst to blacken your character!

MRS. MORRIS

Yes, and, Hilda, many people, even right here in Clarendon, would never believe you had escaped *in time*, and you could never, never live down the shame of it. If you married and had children of your own, the shame would still cling to you!

HILDEGARDE

(*After a moment's pause. Exalted*) All right. Let people think what they please;—Mrs. Oakes, I'll go with you.

MRS. MORRIS

Hilda, if you go down there, it will be something your father and I can never get over; can never forget!

HILDEGARDE

Mother!

MRS. MORRIS

We'll bear the sorrow of this to our graves; — you're young, — you don't know what it means to you, and you can't guess what it is going to mean to us!

HILDEGARDE

Oh, what shall I do? Mother, I can't hurt you! I thought it was mostly myself who would get injured by testifying —

MILES

Don't go, Hilda! — Stay with us!

MRS. MORRIS

(*On her knees, with her arms out toward* HILDEGARDE) You're the only child I'll ever have; Hilda, I beg you, — I implore you!

HILDEGARDE

(*Running to her mother and putting her arms about her*) I can't hurt my mother and my father! You see, Mrs. Oakes, I — I *can't* go!

She clasps her father's and mother's hands, and the three stand together.

MRS. OAKES

Rosie has stood up with her terrible testimony; but she's getting confused under this brilliant but vicious cross-examination, and her health has been utterly crushed,—partly, Hildegarde, because the Madame *punished* her the day after you got out, because Rosie warned you of your peril!

HILDEGARDE

Oh-h, Mother,—think of it? Think of what I owe her! — If *she* hadn't told me, I never could have escaped! And now without me, all she has suffered will go for nothing!

MRS. MORRIS

Think how your *parents* will suffer, daughter!

MRS. OAKES

It isn't for Rosie or for the two or three people of us here that we must decide, it's for the multitude of girls who are being kept in ignorance, who are calling to you to testify and to save them in time—to tell what you know; to cry out from this witness stand and arouse their blind fathers and mothers! And the thousands of lost girls lying in unnamed graves in our own country,—if they had their voices they would cry

out to you to save the others *in time!* If you stay here, Hildegarde, some young souls will drop into the pit that you might have saved!

HILDEGARDE

Father, Mother, it's a bigger thing than any of us,—how can I stay here? I'll never be happy again unless I go and tell what happens to girls,—tell everything I know;—I won't be afraid to speak out! Oh, if *you* had seen that poor girl, that Kitty, her thin hand out for help! Nothing can stop me now! I *will* go and help!

MRS. OAKES

Time's everything. We can make the 4.57 express and get down to the city tonight.

MILES

Hildegarde, I absolutely forbid it!

MRS. MORRIS

(*Beseechingly*) *Hilda!*

HILDEGARDE

It breaks my heart to disobey you. But I know it's right. Forgive me for the pain I'm causing you! . . . I'll get my things, Mrs. Oakes, and be ready in less than ten minutes.

She goes out and runs upstairs.

PEACH BLOOM

MRS. OAKES

Oh, I'm sorry, sorry, this is necessary.

MILES

Can't we prevent this?

MRS. OAKES

Not since she's determined to go. Oh, Jinny, there's no way out of this but the hard one of duty. Though I can never tell you how badly I feel.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Rises*) Small comfort, Martha. I must get our things ready then, for her father and mother shall go with her.

Sound of an auto coming racing up the driveway.

The doorbell rings. EVA appears at living-room door.

EVA

Mr. Hamilton, Ma'am, and he says it's most urgent.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Running to door and calling to him*) *Eric!*

ERIC

ERIC *comes in; a bad scar extends from his right cheek toward his forehead.*

MRS. MORRIS

(*Greeting him with hands flung out entreatingly*) Eric, Eric, come and help us!
Sound of the auto going off.

MILES

(*Shaking his hand warmly*) Why,— have you been wounded?

ERIC

A little accident,— some time ago.

ERIC *advances into room, bowing without surprise to* MRS. OAKES.

You, Mrs. Oakes, are up here to —?

MRS. OAKES

To get Miss Morris's help in this case.

MRS. MORRIS

Eric, you don't know the ghastly story; — how Hildegarde —

ERIC

Didn't you know I knew?

MRS. MORRIS

So Laura told you after all! . . . Help us now! Martha is taking away our child and will use her as a witness in this Rosie case,—tomorrow!

ERIC

I feared that, when I learned at the society this morning how Mrs. Oakes had started for Clarendon on a clue.

MRS. OAKES

Surely you're in sympathy with *my* purpose, Mr. Hamilton, after all the splendid interest you've shown in your visits to the Society in this case!

ERIC

I caught the limited and motored forty miles back to prevent it if possible. But you're right, Mrs. Oakes. You've *got* to find another witness, or have this case end in a wretched failure.

MRS. OAKES

Yes, and Hildegard is the only one who'll *dare* to testify!

ERIC

But suppose I run down another, who could prove this woman a slaver, wouldn't you let Hildegard off?

MRS. OAKES

Another?

ERIC

One of the men who visited there?

MRS. OAKES

Persuade one of the *men* to *offer* to testify to having gone there! — You can't mean it!

ERIC

But I do.

MRS. OAKES

I've never met a man yet who'd *willingly* testify to the kind of thing brave Hildegarde is *eager* to.

ERIC

I know he will.

MRS. OAKES

Who is the man?

ERIC

One of the men who saw her there.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Shrinking*) That Flint?

ERIC

No, Flint went out on a wild ride with one of the girls that same night,—they crashed over a seventy-foot cliff,—a quick death.

MRS. OAKES

You're *sure* this man saw Miss Morris there?

ERIC

(*In a husky voice*) Yes,—the very drunken fellow who helped her out.

MRS. OAKES

You're a born detective, Mr. Hamilton! And a man admitted to that exclusive house must have had standing,—wealth or social position. His story would make a sensation!

ERIC

It would:—he comes from one of the older families.

MRS. OAKES

I feel so sorry for my friends here that I'll consider deeply, Mr. Hamilton;—who is the man?

ERIC

He's before you.

MRS. MORRIS

(*Recoiling*) Eric, you can't mean —

MILES

(*Hoarsely*) Do you mean that *you* —?

ERIC

Say what you please; — nothing could be worse than what I think of myself.

MRS. MORRIS

Oh,— *Hildegarde!*

MRS. OAKES

It's very loyal of you, Mr. Hamilton, to offer to shield your cousin from appearing, but have you any proofs?

ERIC

(*Producing key*) The key to the very room.

MRS. OAKES

You might have received that from the man in question.

ERIC

(*Passing his hand across his scar*) But I got *this* by being the man in question,— in the struggle at the door. . . . You see now, Mrs. Oakes, what I'm offering for her protection?

MRS. OAKES

(*Slowly*) I see:—the scarring of your good name and social standing,—a great price. (*Turning to the MORRISES, who are aghast*) After all, Jinny; after all, Professor Morris, we mustn't forget you owe your daughter's life to Mr. Hamilton.

ERIC

So you *will* take me, Mrs. Oakes, instead of Hildegarde?

MRS. OAKES

I can't tell,—I must think it over.

MILES

Virginia, we must talk this all over with Mrs. Oakes in my study as affecting Hildegarde, if — (*Bowing to ERIC*) You will excuse us. (*With a sudden impulse he puts his hand on ERIC's shoulder*) We appreciate this offer, Eric,—it's a manly thing.

The three go out, into the study at right.

ERIC, *who has risen with mechanically good manners as they depart, sinks into a chair with hands over his face.*

HILDEGARDE *is seen coming down the stairs; then she looks through the doorway hesitat-*

ingly. Has her suitcase, and is in traveling costume, with her hat on.

HILDEGARDE

Mother? I'm going now.

HILDEGARDE *comes in. She stops short as she sees ERIC, who rises.*

HILDEGARDE

(Says in suppressed excitement) Eric!

ERIC

Hildegarde! . . . How I've longed to see you! I've written so many letters to you which have never gone; — I was too much ashamed.

HILDEGARDE

I thought perhaps — perhaps — you'd write about why — about how —

ERIC

I had no excuse to offer.

HILDEGARDE

(As he turns his head, she sees his scar) That scar! On the way to Cousin Laura's that night you said the shot had only made a "scratch"!

ERIC

But for *your* nerve, that Peter's bullet would have gone through my brain!

HILDEGARDE

I tried for his arm.

ERIC

And hit like a sharpshooter, and spoiled his aim.

HILDEGARDE

Isn't the world strange,— and *terrible!* I had never touched reality before.

ERIC

Beautiful things can be real too, my child.

HILDEGARDE

Child? I'm no longer a child. Why I'm old enough to help on this problem,— tomorrow!

ERIC

No!

HILDEGARDE

And I want to work at this for a lifetime.

ERIC

But don't crowd out the blessedly sweet things,
— home and children,— and be left alone,— as
I am.

HILDEGARDE

Are you so lonely?

ERIC

Yes, and I must grow lonelier,— parted from
you.

HILDEGARDE

You saved me, Eric, and I'm grateful to you
for that down to the very bottom of my heart,
but your going to such places cast my faith in you
into the flames.

ERIC

I *will* tell you something,— though it's poor,—
it was the only time.

HILDEGARDE

(*Gladly*) The *only* time! Oh, Eric, keep
that true! For the sake of the years that have
been!

ERIC

I never dreamed you wouldn't tell your
parents.

HILDEGARDE

I couldn't tell even them. You'd always meant so much to me.

ERIC

(*Deeply moved. Kissing her hands*) Hildegard, my darling! Can you forgive?

HILDEGARDE

Oh yes,— *now*.

ERIC

And,— *forget?*

HILDEGARDE

I wish I could! But I don't see how I can — *forget*.

ERIC

You're the very core of my life. The only sweet thing in it.

HILDEGARDE

Don't, don't! I can't bear it.

ERIC

Can't you try,— for the sake of the years that have been?

HILDEGARDE

If only my faith would come back again! Ah, Eric, how I did worship you!

MRS. MORRIS *and* MRS. OAKES *come in from the study.*

MRS. OAKES

Mr. Hamilton, I accept you as witness; I'll telephone at once, and you'll appear tomorrow morning.

ERIC

Good! — Then Hildegarde does *not* go?

HILDEGARDE

What's all this? — *I not* go?

MRS. OAKES

My dear, Mr. Hamilton offers to testify in your stead, and what he'll swear to is just the testimony we need to convict that "Madame" of white slavery.

HILDEGARDE

Eric! (*Turning to look gratefully at him*)
And *can't* I help if I go too?

MRS. OAKES

It wouldn't be worth the cost to yourself and your parents.

MRS. MORRIS

Let me help take off your things, daughter.
Eric, I thank you for saving my child's name . . .

Mrs. Oakes wants to start at once, and I've ordered the car.

ERIC

I'm ready. Good-bye, Jinny. Try not to think too hardly of me.

MRS. OAKES

(*Looking at her watch*) I've just time to telephone my lawyer,—if I may?

MRS. MORRIS

Yes,—let me show you, Martha.

She takes MRS. OAKES out through the hall.

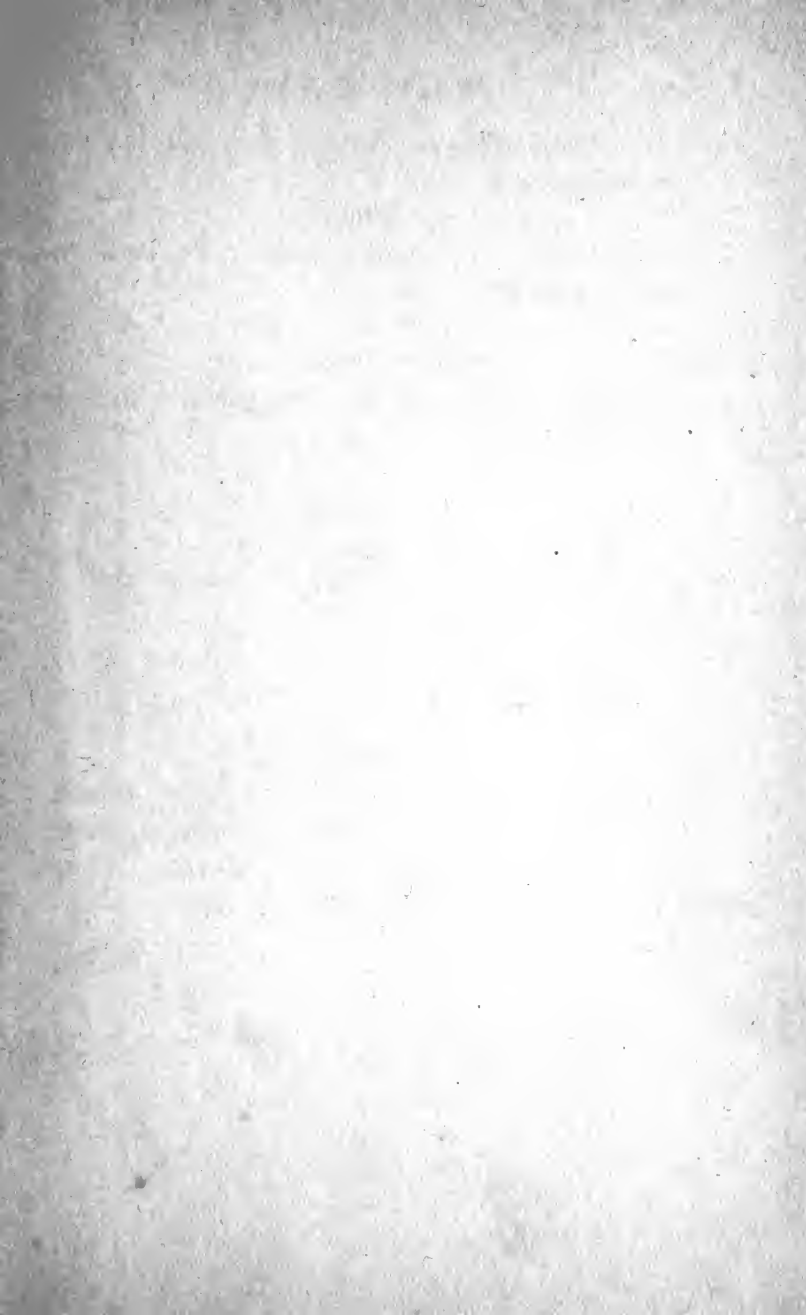
ERIC

Good-bye, Hildegarde.

HILDEGARDE

(*Runs to him, holding out both her hands*)
Oh, Eric! Dear Eric! I'm sure now my faith will come back! (*Half laughs, half sobs*) And I reckon it's *just round* the corner now!

CURTAIN

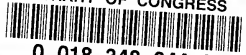








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